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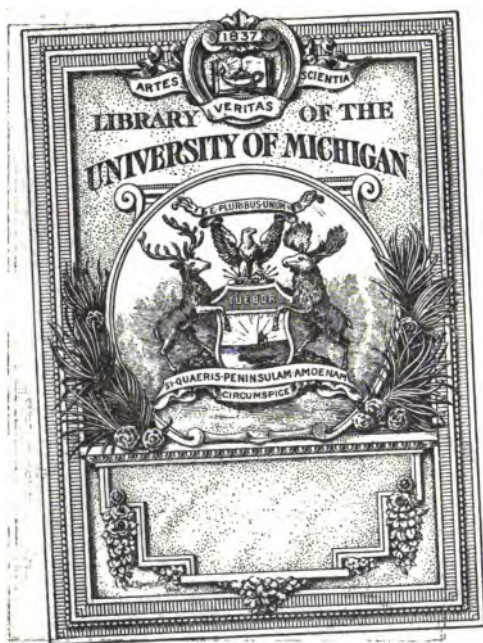
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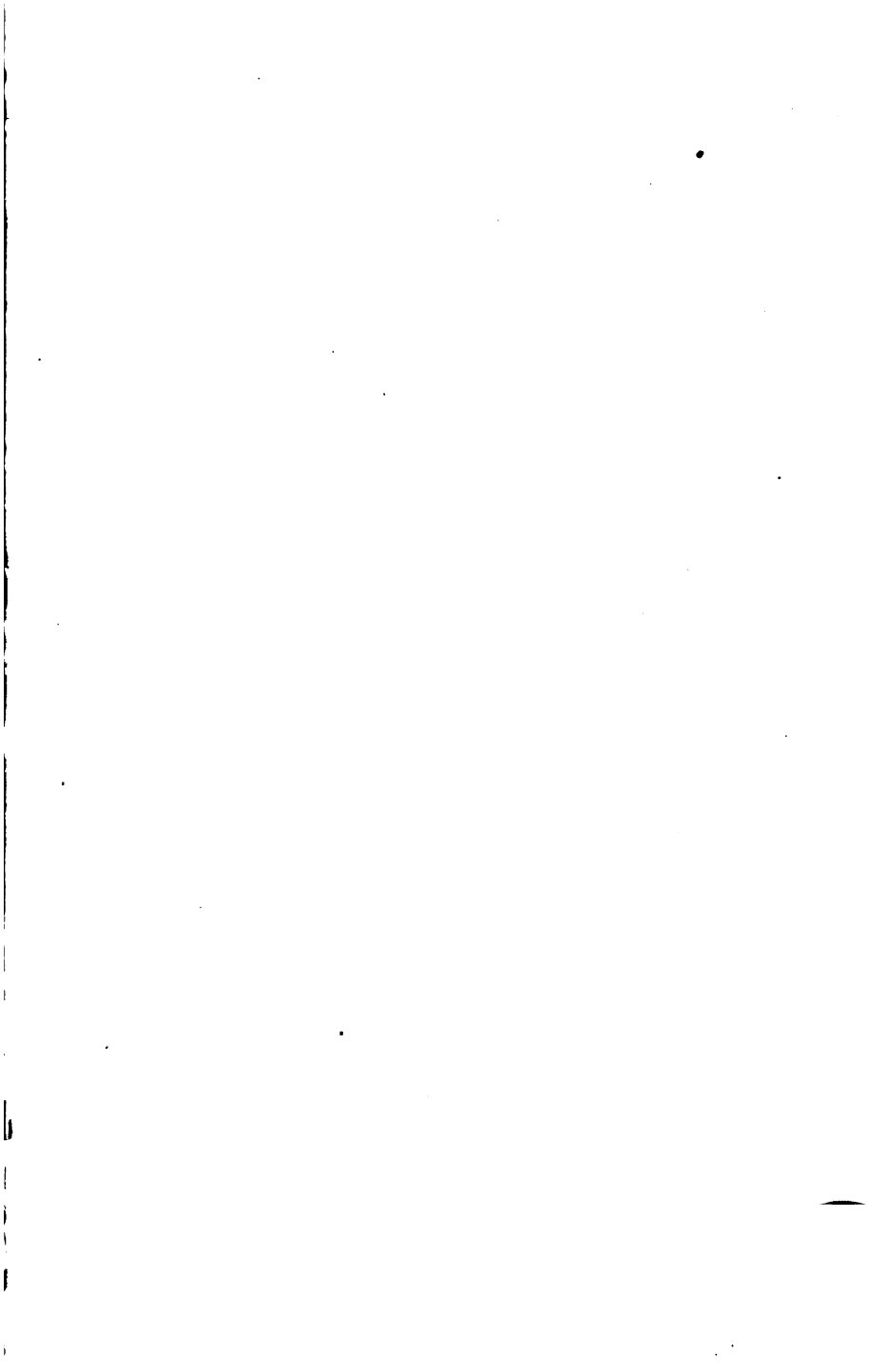
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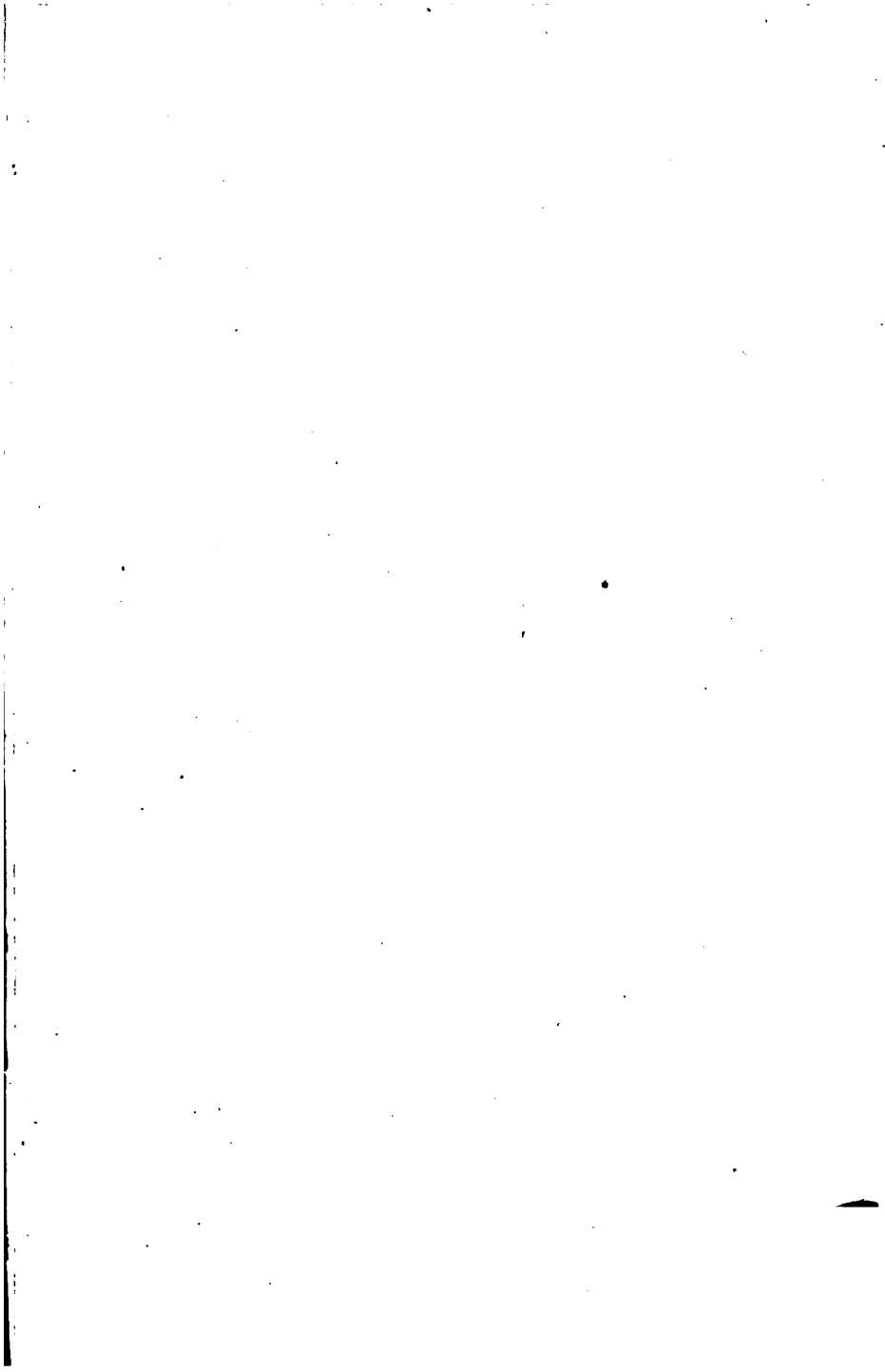
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By Ruth Hall



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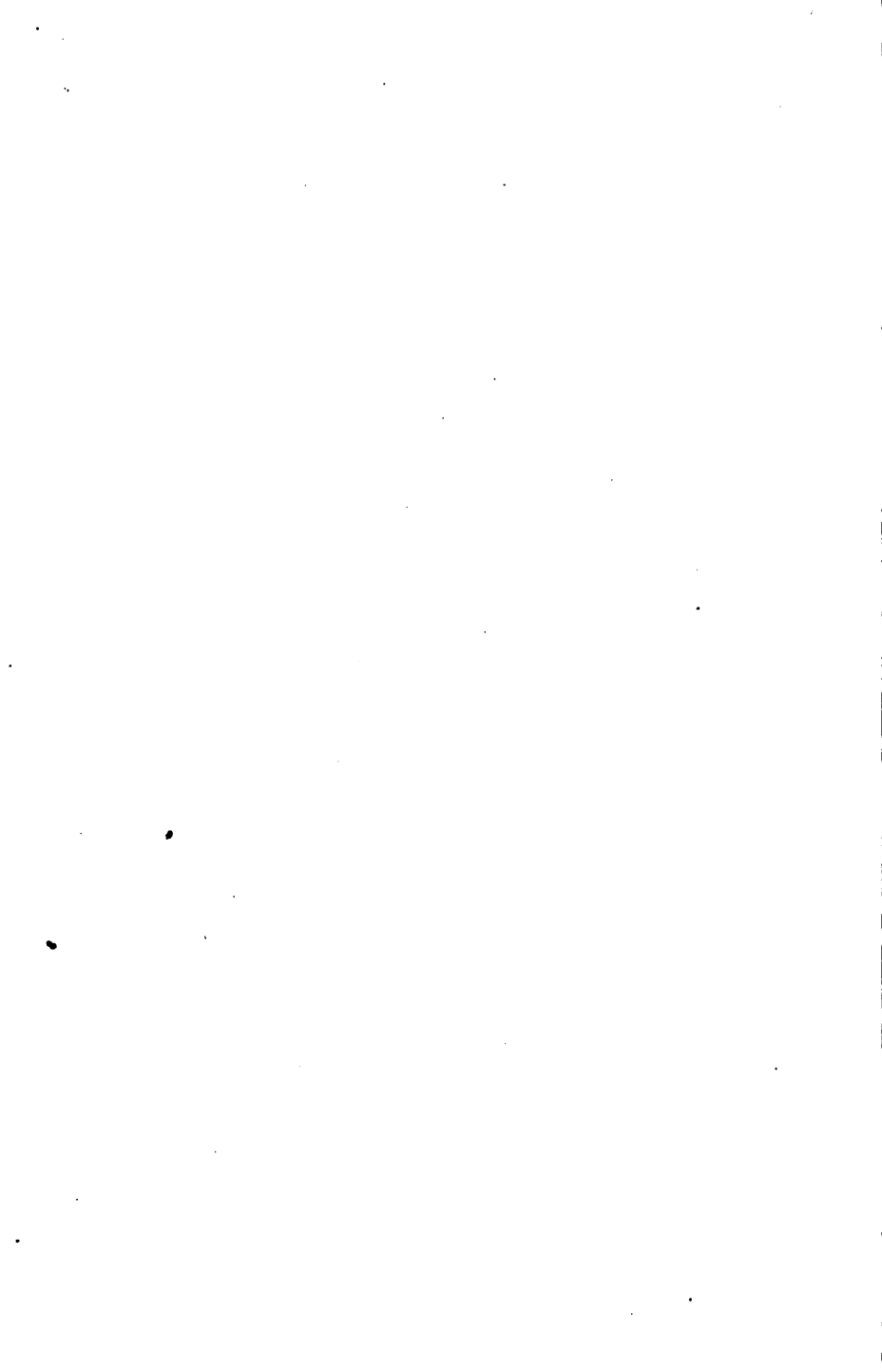
Dedication

**IN SENDING FORTH THIS BOOK I RECALL EACH FRIEND
WHO BY REMINISCENCE OR BY SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE
HAS HELPED ME TO WRITE IT.**

AND AMONG THOSE FRIENDS, HERE, AS ALWAYS, FIRST

I NAME

MY MOTHER



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A DOWNRENTER'S SON

CHAPTER I

THE SHIBBOLETH

There is nothing equal to the smallness of a small town.

ALFRED TENNYSON.

DR. COLTON stood on the threshold of the disorderly kitchen, peering about him in his near-sighted fashion: "I thought Henry was here."

"He's cording the spare-room bedstead."

"Then where is Allie?"

"I sent him after the carpenter, father."

"Oh! Would you like to go with me, Phe? I am just starting out on my calls."

His daughter glanced at her mother over the stiff billows of the carpet she was sewing together. Next she looked toward the tall, angular figure of their Yankee help. Jemima was fast setting this one room in order. Mrs. Colton was unpacking the contents of the kitchen closet. Three pairs of hands were more than needed on this day of their moving into a new home. It was inconsiderate of her father to demand her services elsewhere. But consideration is the last grace given to the best of

men. The Colton family was accustomed to such requests.

"Oh, yes. Go, Phe," said her mother.

"Go on," echoed Jemima Lane. "I'll finish them seams an' put the carpet down soon as I git through with this."

Her strong arms made a passage by which the girl could emerge from among the unwieldy mounds. "Don't let mother overwork while I am gone," Phœbe whispered entreatingly in this opportunity.

Jemima was the product of a day when her native New England was given over to philosophy. "We can't do nobuddy else's work in this world," she observed generally. "We'd be busy with our own if ye stayed, an' we'll be busy with our own while ye're gone. They's enough left for ye to see to when ye come back. Don't fret."

With such solace to her conscience Phe was free to enjoy her escape from confusion and uncongenial tasks to the bliss that comes near perfection—a country drive in early spring. Before the wide barn door stood a chaise. She climbed to a seat, as her father led out old Sam and harnessed him with the ease of practice.

"I am going to the Mixes'," he remarked while thus occupied. "We'll get there probably about dinner-time. I shall be glad to have you meet their young people. They'll be companions for you."

Phe accordingly looked forward to the visit throughout their earlier calls, while they drove along the quiet road, or she held the horse at the

gate of one farmhouse after another. She enjoyed it all: the fresh green beauty of her surroundings, their gentle progress, the sense of protection which was sweet when with her father.

Dr. Colton had preceded by a few weeks his family's arrival at Farley, and experienced that curious pride one knows in acting as a guide. He pointed out the tollkeeper's little house at one end of the covered bridge, where old Sam's hoofs roused a hollow echo and the sunlight fell in a latticed pattern through the cutwork on the weather-beaten sides. He showed Phe a far-away glimpse of the red and yellow rocking coach with its mailbags and load of passengers. He dilated upon the view from Baldwin Heights and the Cripple Bush, where they were making sugar when he first came in March. At last he drew rein before a substantial large brick house whose eaves projected over a stone basement. It was set back from the road in the midst of a wide yard in which the new grass was coming up around the syringa bushes.

"And this is the Mixes'," said he, smiling. "Look about you."

"Why, father?"

"No matter now," as a door opened in the vestibule. "Just keep your eyes open. That's all."

A girl came into sight in the hard-beaten path winding through the grass around the house. She seemed about Phe's age, which was sixteen years, and was dressed in a calico gown, with nankeen pantalettes and a slat bonnet. From the depths of this headgear she gazed out in a friendly fashion upon the visitors.

"Glad to see you, doctor," she called. "Gran'-ma's been watching for you ever since breakfast. She said, seems if you'd never come."

The good physician was not disturbed by this impatience, which he knew to be the outgrowth of loneliness rather than ill-health. In the solitude of farm life a guest's welcome was assured, and "the more the merrier" a fact. Dr. Colton never had deemed it a favor to himself if he stopped on his rounds for a meal, nor did he hesitate to bring with him any member of his family.

"This is my daughter," he announced, stepping from the chaise, "and this, Phoebe, is Miss Mary Ann Mix. I hope you two will be friends. Phe is to enter school to-morrow, Miss Mary Ann. You will look after her a little, won't you?"

His pleasant voice continued, that their young hostess might have time to recover her composure. She nodded shyly to his query and found scant breath to mutter, —

"Walk right in, please. You're just in time for dinner. I'll help you tie the horse."

Phe followed the others along the narrow foot-way to a back door. She saw her father march in assuredly, after knocking with the head of his whip. Mary Ann was at his heels and she behind Mary Ann.

They entered a broad, low room running the width of the house. At the farther side was a fireplace where an old woman crouched in an arm-chair. At their approach she raised her head, swathed in flannel.

"Glat to see you, toctor," she said querulously. "I t'ought ye gome neffer."

The doctor presented his daughter to Mrs. Mix before he assumed his professional habit. Drawing a chair beside his patient he began a series of questions relative to her neuralgia, and left the girls to their devices.

They were the only other occupants of the room.

"Pa and Omar will be in, in a minute, to dinner," Mary Ann remarked as if apologizing for their absence. "Josephine's in the store to-day, and Demosthenes ain't scarcely ever at home. He's a lawyer."

She tossed her head in affected carelessness over this information. Phe saw that Demosthenes — whoever else he might be — was the pride of the family. She made a noncommittal answer in her throat, sitting on the wooden chair Mary Ann had indicated by an outstretched finger, and smiling up at the other girl stepping briskly about the room. Meanwhile, as her father had counseled, she kept her eyes wide open.

There seemed an invisible line dividing this kitchen through the centre. On one side, the floor was covered by a well-preserved rag carpet; on the other was the bare pine wood, painted yellow and shining like a mirror. There was the yawning fireplace, with a Dutch oven and a kettle swinging over the wood coals. Here was a glistening stove, holding the frying-pan of sizzling pork. Mrs. Mix punctuated her complaints to the doctor by dropping her snuff-box and jumping up to stir the

samp bubbling in its huge pot. Mary Ann set back the teakettle and began to dish a pile of potatoes bursting from their jackets. Were there two meals in preparation? Phe stared in perplexity from one fire to the other. Their heat was almost unendurable on so mild a day. She was thankful that she sat near an open door, and her father was urging Mrs. Mix to get out of the house into the sunshine and fresher air.

"It is what you need," he said. "Medicine does no good while you shut yourself up like this."

"You can't move gran'ma," commented Mary Ann.

It was evident that this remark was not to be taken literally, for with the doctor's aid she now proceeded to conduct Mrs. Mix to the dinner-table. After this, with a glance at the sun-mark, she ran out onto the porch, and raising two fingers to her lips, breathed a shrill, whistling call.

"Sha'n't I blow the horn for you, Miss Mary Ann?" asked Dr. Colton.

He laid a hand on it where it hung behind the door, but the girl and her grandmother gave a simultaneous startled cry. "Oh, no," Mary Ann explained hurriedly. "Nobody would expect it. They would n't understand. Pa'll be here in a minute. He heard me all right."

"See to my gorn-breat, shilt," Mrs. Mix admonished her in a palpable interruption.

Their visitors felt uncomfortable at this encounter with a secret. The doctor strolled to the

door, his daughter busied herself setting the pork and potatoes on the table, while Mary Ann crossed to the open fire and removing a bed of coals from the iron bake kettle, took out a plump loaf yellow with Indian meal. She filled a wooden bowl with samp and brought both to her grandmother, laying at the same time a lump of loaf sugar by Mrs. Mix's plate, although on her own tray of tea-things stood a sugar-bowl.

A gray-haired farmer, with his raw-boned, bashful son, now stamped across the porch. They acknowledged the doctor's introduction with uneasy good will, and the meal that followed was silent save as the guest made conversation, shyly seconded by Mary Ann, or by her father, who appeared to have rather more acquaintance with the world than the boy known as Omar. Mrs. Mix ate the food she had prepared, disdaining her granddaughter's cooking except for a bowl of tea, which she sweetened by biting at the lump of sugar provided for her and all too obviously holding it in her mouth while she took a gulp of the hot drink.

Phe was accustomed to the fine simplicity, the economies, and the culture of poor gentlefolk. The rude profusion, the coarse manners of this household, offended that youthful intolerance that ranks certain blunders in etiquette as a sin. Yet she was drawn to Mary Ann by the sympathy of their age and sex. She was pleased to have her father announce as they rose from the table that he must visit a patient in a neighboring township.

whither Omar, it seemed, had an errand. The doctor could carry the young man with him in his chaise if Phe chose to spend the afternoon here, where he might stop for her on his return.

Both girls eagerly assented to the plan. They performed together the office known as doing the dinner dishes. Then leaving Mrs. Mix dozing over her fire, Mary Ann with an important air led the way from the kitchen. "Let's go in the parlor a while," said she. "We can see the passing from there. It's pleasanter."

Their path lay through a dining-room sombre in dull blue paint, its black chairs set against the wall except for a Boston rocker drawn up by the Franklin stove. A rag carpet covered the floor. Everything was in perfect order.

"We eat in the kitchen and we set there mostly," Mary Ann explained. "Gran'ma, you know, she's kind of stubborn. She likes her own way, the way she's used to. So we humor her."

"I think it's beautiful of you," said Phe heartily.

"Oh, that's all right." Mary Ann threw open a door. "This," she exclaimed with a thrill in her voice, "is the best room."

The prim bareness inclosed by those four walls represented to the Mix family the farthest heights of splendor. Green paper shades tempered the light from the windows. On the green and red ingrain carpet were precisely placed a few oak chairs, reed-seated. At either end of the mantel-piece stood brass candlesticks, with a tray and

snuffers midway between them. Several gayly colored pictures on the wall lent a dash of brilliancy to the gray paint. Mary Ann led her new friend from one to another of these, explaining the subjects.

"This is Innocence," she remarked, "and this is A Southern Beauty."

Phe had the taste acquired in a lifelong possession of those old prints and family portraits, the Chippendale chairs and spindle-legged tables, that Jemima and Mrs. Colton were at that instant engaged in unpacking. But she had as well the tact usually accompanying the taste. She said some honest kindly sentences over Mary Ann's household gods and thus increased the charm of her face and her manner.

"I wish Demosthenes would happen in," observed Mary Ann. "He'd like you."

"Where is Demosthenes?" Phe queried, roused to curiosity.

"Oh, he's in Farley. He's a lawyer. He can't board home. It's too far. He practices law in Farley. Josephine's there too. She's my sister. She tends store when pa's busy on the farm. You know pa keeps a store."

"Why no, I did n't know that."

"Did n't you?" Mary Ann opened her eyes in surprise. "Oh, but then you've just come. If you'd lived here any time you could n't help hearing about it. They say," with the same toss of her head as when she spoke of her brother's profession, "what you can't get at Mix's you can't

get anywheres. That's a sort of saying around here. Mix's is pa's store."

Phe was utterly unassuming, and content to listen to the other's boasts. They therefore parted still the best of friends, after some hours together, when the doctor stopped at dusk for his daughter.

The spring twilight was sprinkled with stars as they drove happily home. The girl chattered of her day's experience, and her father in his gentle, even tones commented on its happenings. It was an index of her breeding that Phe should in no way allude to the episode of the dinner horn.

"And Mary Ann is just as good to her grandmother!" said she.

"I am glad to have you see one of those households," the doctor remarked, "where the old Dutch ways and the newer American life touch but will not intermingle. They are a curious study and they yearly of course grow rarer. Some day you will remember" —

"Father, what is that?"

The girl's tense fingers grasped his arm. The soft voice died away. Sam reared and stopped. The little party — man and woman and beast — were alike for an instant startled into fear.

They had been passing the schoolhouse of the district, where a streak of light at door and shuttered window betrayed occupation. Phe spoke as the door was flung open. The glowing line changed to a broad glare. Against this background there appeared a figure so strange and

horrid that it might well call forth a frightened cry.

A tall man strode down the steps. His face was concealed by a sheepskin cap, his eyes and nose, ears and mouth, showing grotesquely through long slashes. He wore a calico blouse over his ordinary clothes. It reached below the knees and was tied about the waist with a bright-colored sash. In one hand he carried a rifle.

Dr. Colton struck his horse with the reins. He called in a high, strained voice, "Get up, Sam."

The man sprang to the carriage-side. Before they could evade him he had seized the bridle. He raised his frightful mask to meet the doctor's eyes.

"Down with the rent," he cried.

CHAPTER II

ALONG THE ROAD TO SCHOOL

A most fowle unhandsome thing as ever was heard. — PEPPYS.

DR. COLTON gave a little laugh as if of relief, yet Phe fancied there was vexation too in his manner. He leaned forward, gathering up the reins.

"Down with the rent," he said.

The man fell back at once. His hands dropped from the headstall and he turned on his heel. Waving a friendly salute to the travelers he ran up the steps and disappeared into the schoolhouse. The door shut behind him, but not before it could be seen that the room was full of other figures in a like disguise.

The doctor drove on.

"Father," Phe began in a trembling voice, "what does it all mean? I don't understand."

"Neither do I," with a scornful chuckle. "The thing's a tangle, child. The rights of it, as I see them — get up, Sam — the rights of it are simply this. The country hereabouts belongs to the Van Rensselaers, part of the grant to the first patroon. The tenants, and those on other patents, question the landlords' title to the land and prefer their own claims, founded on generations of occupancy.

There is the situation in a nutshell. No one can foretell," the doctor's tone grew troubled, "how far it may go. I fear there is worse mischief afoot than frightening off a landlord's agent, or stopping a passer-by where they are holding an indignation meeting."

"Do you side with the tenants?"

"Why, no! It's the patroon's land. No farmer has a stronger hold to his farm than I on mine, simply because his family may have paid rent for two hundred years and I but for two months."

Phe was silent.

"However, it does no good," her father continued, "to argue with the fellows. They are beyond conviction. Neither can I fight them. I must look after my interests and those of my family and echo their war-cry on demand."

Still the girl said nothing.

"You young folks are so downright," the doctor added presently. "You think there is no middle course. All must be blackest bad, or whitest good. We learn as we go on in life the plain common sense of minding one's own affairs."

The time was by fifty years removed from the day when parents should be brought to trial with the swift, stern sentence of their children's judgment. Phe uttered a demurring cry at the notion of appealing from her father's opinions.

"Oh, it is not that. It could not be. I was only thinking of the outcome if these men should not be checked."

"I confess I cannot guess it. Anti-rent associa-

tions disclaim any intention of violence. Yet an Uprenter was killed last year in Rensselaer County, and although two hundred witnesses were examined, the murderer was never discovered. Six years ago (the dissatisfaction has been brewing so long) Governor Seward was obliged to send out the sheriff of Albany County to collect rents, protected by a posse of the military companies of the capital. That move cowed the Downrenters temporarily. They were not dispersed, and to my fancy they are ready for another outbreak now."

Her father's words were recalled to Phe by what took place as she and her brother were on their way, the next day, to school. They had not proceeded far from home before the girl heard some one shriek her name like a shrill, unmelodious Phœbe-bird. Mary Ann Mix was approaching along a path through the fields, swinging her dinner-pail.

Phe presented her small brother, after which they resumed their walk.

"Why, here's Gitty and Almira!" Mary Ann exclaimed directly. "Ain't they been quick? They've come clear around by the turnpike."

Phœbe regarded the new arrivals, — another girl and boy some years her seniors. "I don't know them," she said. "Will you introduce me?"

She asked more than she imagined. Mary Ann had already envied the grace with which Albert was presented to her notice. She had never performed this ceremony. In their own phrase, the young people of Farley "scraped acquaintance." Her round cheeks flamed. Her breath came fast.

"Miss Gitty Hager, Miss Phoebe Colton," she muttered hoarsely as a salutation to the approaching pair. "Mr. Almiran Sweet, Miss Phoebe Colton."

She stopped short. How could she go through again with that ordeal, and for a little fellow like Allie Colton? Her tongue refused to move.

Gitty Hager, a heavy-faced, big-framed girl, grew purple with embarrassment. She shifted her weight from one foot to the other and glowered sheepishly at Phoebe. Almiran was a good-looking youth whose large, handsome features shone with perspiration at this novel experience. But, as often happens on such occasions, he forced himself to rise to an emergency wherein his feminine companion remained desperately silent.

"Pleased to meet you," his deep voice growled.

Phoebe was perplexed by this behavior. Accustomed to the amenities of a gentle life, she bore herself with that assurance which is never successfully assumed.

"This is my brother Albert, Miss Hager; Mr. Sweet," she explained, with her radiant smile. "Are we all going to school together?"

"Guess so," replied Almiran.

After this second attempt at politeness he relapsed into taciturnity. The awkwardness would have been overpowering were not Gitty Hager even more excited than shy.

"Almiran's got something to show us," she remarked aside to Mary Ann, "and he won't tell what it is."

"What is it?" Allie instantly demanded.

"You 'll see soon as ye git to Jurimy Loucks's."

"Oh," cried Mary Ann shrilly, "Jurimy Loucks's? I bet I know."

"I bet you don't."

"What is it?" Allie repeated.

"I know."

"I bet you don't."

"I guessed Indians," Gitty interpolated. "But he said no."

"Pooh, Indians!" echoed the little boy in bravado courage. "There are n't any Indians nowadays."

To Phoebe's mystification and to the child's horror the others exchanged a sidelong glance of amusement.

"Ain't they?" Almiran rejoined with sarcastic emphasis.

"The Indians are all out West," Allie persisted.

"Phoebe, are n't the Indians all out West?"

"Yes, dear."

Again she intercepted another sly look. It gave her an eerie sense of evil.

"There!" Allie triumphed. "Did you hear that? I guess my sister knows."

"All right," agreed Almiran good-humoredly.

"Of course she knows. And Gitty *told* you it wa' n't Indians."

"Then what is it?"

"I know," Mary Ann insisted.

"You just say that," the young fellow declared, hitting the fence with his dinner-pail as he walked, "'cause you think it 'll make me tell you."

"What is it?" Allie's sweet treble was unwavering in its refrain.

"S. M.," Mary Ann announced with a provoking smile.

The Colton children were still in the dark. Gitty seemed to understand. "Is it S. M.?" she inquired of Almiran.

His features clouded. He pouted his lips like a baby. "Well, yes, if I must say it," he acknowledged sulkily. "I don't see how you come to guess."

"I heard pa tell gran'ma they'd be there before many days. Ain't it awful?"

"My father said so too. He said so only last night," Gitty hastened to interpose. "He said he hoped Jurimy would hold out."

"He's holding out," Almiran informed her.

"What is S. M.?" Allie changed his query.

Phe was walking by herself in the path close to the rail fence. She felt set aside, an interloper. Her dignity was hurt. She considered these acquaintances both unkind and rude. She was annoyed by her brother's curiosity.

"What is S. M.?" he asked again.

And once more there was that intimation of a common joke in the youth's smile at the two girls. "I guess you'll find out soon enough," Almiran assured him. "Folks around here ain't long in doubt what S. M. stands for."

They all laughed.

"I sha'n't speak," Phe determined with a lump in her throat. She winked fast to keep back the

tears. "They can do all the talking after this. My mother would n't be pleased with the sort of friends I'm making. So mean!"

"Look there!" called Almiran.

He was leading the little party, who walked single file in the narrow way. Thus he shouted over his shoulder, pointing ahead as they turned a corner in the road.

A red farmhouse stretched like an elongated spyglass back from the highway close to which the front was built as if for companionship. The structure had a comfortable, prosperous air. The group of barns was still more pretentious. It appeared to be the home of a well-to-do farmer.

The narrow front yard was trampled beneath the feet of a half-dozen men, marshaled by a red-faced, angry official exulting in unassailable authority.

"Bring 'em along," his harsh voice rang out. "Bring 'em right along. I've talked with them women-folks enough."

"What did I tell you?" quoth Almiran to the others.

Gitty and Mary Ann clutched each other's hands. "Ain't it terrible?" they cried in a breath.

A horse and buggy stood before the gate. The man who was holding the reins gave Almiran a sickly smile.

"Putting Jurimy out?" asked the young fellow.

"Yep."

"Nice bus'ness, ain't it?" Almiran pursued.

"Well, 'tain't none o' yourn nor mine," was the retort. "Jurimy had fair warning. He could 'a' been spared all this if he'd been a min' to."

"Yes," Gitty disdainfully acquiesced. "If he'd been a mind to give in and own he was wrong and the agent was right. And if he did he would n't live long in Farley. He knows that too. Farley ain't any place for Uprenters."

"Come along," interrupted Mary Ann with a shake of her skirts. "Don't let 's talk to anybody that 'll put a sick man out of his house and home."

They flaunted past the wagon, pushing on up to the gate. Gitty's last words had given Phe a clue to the situation. She spoke to the constable, Allie, his mouth gaping, hanging on her arm. "Is it a Downrenter," she inquired, "resisting the sheriff's men?"

"That's about what they is of it." The man was evidently grateful for her courteous manner. "Jurimy Loucks is well off. He's got plenty. And he 'll let himself be turned out ruther 'n give the agent a few bushel o' wheat; that's how it is."

A piercing scream broke in on the conversation. Phe whirled about toward the sound. Allie began to whimper.

In the front door of the farmhouse stood a gaunt woman clad in a scant calico gown. Her head and shoulders were wrapped in a worsted shawl. "You got to set me outdoors," she clamored. "I won't stir a step. I won't put foot to ground. You got to set me out."

"Set her out, Job," said the deputy sheriff.

The woman uttered another shriek. Gitty and Mary Ann raised their cries in concert. Almiran called, "Shame onto you!" and Allie's wail grew louder. The deputy appeared unmoved by the din save that the dull red face deepened its hue. The fellow named Job, with a comrade, in patent reluctance, threw their arms about the woman's rigid figure and carried her down the walk. Her cries were unceasing, although she made no physical resistance.

"Now bring out my sick man," she exclaimed as soon as she was stationed beside the gate. "That's all you got 'o do. Bring out the women an' the sick folks, an' kill 'em both. They ain't anything meaner in the world, not even for Tobe Snyder."

Almiran's guffaw encouraged this speech. The deputy heeded it only by bidding him "shut up."

"Git Jurimy Loucks," he commanded. "Fetch mattress and all. He's got 'o come."

Phe endeavored to quiet her brother, the clamor of the others redoubling as the abashed constables once more disappeared through the doorway. Presently four men emerged, bearing an improvised litter. Upon it was stretched a wasted form with face as white as the sheet tucked underneath the chin. Two clawlike hands twitched at the patchwork quilt. A little bent old woman squeezed herself up to the pallet, walking close beside it. Her wan features, set in an expression of terror, sent a pang to Phe's heart, untouched by the noise

of the virago. She tried to push toward the bed. She wished to comfort the attendant. She felt it to be but decent to find if there were not something she could do for the invalid. But Tobe Snyder barred her way.

"Git out o' this," he growled. "They's too many women here a'ready."

"Let me! Let me!" begged Allie. "Oh, I'll give them all the money in my bank. I'll pay the rent. I'll do" —

Mrs. Loucks ceased her screams as suddenly as if her mechanism had run down. Something like a smile flashed across her grim-set lips. "Land o' love, sonny," she said to the child, "we don't want your money. We've got money enough."

"Then why" — he began in bewilderment.

"Come on, Allie," interrupted Almiran, seizing his hand. "We'll be late to school if we don't hurry. And we can't do no good here."

"Have they truly got money enough?" the little boy inquired, submitting, however, to be led away. "Have they, honest and truly?"

"Why, of course," Gitty broke in from behind them. They were falling into line again in the footpath. "It ain't lack o' money that's the matter."

"What is it, then?"

For an instant there was no reply.

"Principle," said Almiran at length.

Following the word, like a refrain, there came from Jurimy Loucks's barn the peremptory blast of a horn.

CHAPTER III

THE DINNER HORN

There is a period in youth when the mere power of numbers has a more strong effect on ear and imagination than in after life. — WALTER SCOTT.

“WHAT’S that?” cried Allie excitedly. “Nobody’s having dinner already.”

“No matter,” Almiran answered, laughing. “That’s all right. Don’t let it bother you, little boy. You come along to school.”

Allie was not to be so readily silenced. He had a child’s inquisitiveness and persistency, and would have pursued the subject had not his sister, her sore pride impelling her to interfere, ordered him sternly to be still.

And at this point the schoolhouse was reached. The ugly building, its walls covered with charcoal autographs and jackknife intaglios, stood on a knoll in a pine grove, where the falling needles strove in vain to carpet ground that was worn bare and hard. At a convenient distance flourished a quince-tree planted by some pedagogue with a thought of his successors and a knowledge that the ideal rod would be thence supplied in the future.

About the grove was scattered a score of chil-

dren, the younger girls playing house within the stone boundaries they had laid under a spreading tree, the boys shrieking at one another over their whirling tops. A group of their elders whispered with heads bent close together. There was a sense of something unusual in the air.

Almiran joined the conference, but Gitty and Mary Ann stayed with the strangers. As they lingered on the doorstep a voice hailed them.

"Helloa, Gitty," it said.

Phe, looking up, saw a young fellow swing himself over the stone wall bounding the Loucks farm at this point. He was a big, broad-shouldered youth, not prepossessing at first sight, with his confident look and his cold keen eyes. But he smiled on Allie in passing, clapping the child on the shoulder, and that light transfigured his face. No one is hopelessly ugly who has a good mouth. The even, white teeth, the finely curved lips, the sweet though fleeting expression, won a way to Phe Colton's heart. "I like that boy," she thought.

"Helloa, Matt," Gitty responded carelessly.

"Who is he?" Allie inquired after the young man had passed them. "Is n't he splendid?"

Gitty tossed her head. "I don't know as Matt's so very splendid. He's my brother."

"I think he's splendid." Allie's eyes followed Matt Hager in his approach to the whispering group beyond them. "Why don't you like him, Gitty?"

They all laughed at this. "Oh, I like him well

enough," his sister rejoined with an offhand manner that could not conceal her pride. "I was only thinking he's such a case to carry on."

Neither Allie nor Phe knew what was meant by "a case to carry on." Gitty perceived that the latter also gazed with interest after Mathice, and she regretted not having included him in their own company. That, of course, was what his salutation invited. Boys did not address their family in public unless they wished something of them. But it was too late now. Almiran was accosting the newcomer.

"Why ain't you out with the rest?" he asked. "Did you go?"

"Oh, I went. Yes. But there was nothing to do."

"Why not?" queried some one else.

"Too many others," said Matt. He lowered his voice. "Tobe was scared off before half the Indians got there. I tell you Loucks's woman is as good as a watch-dog herself."

Ding-ding, ding-dong! clanged a bell at the window.

It was rung by a slim, pale-faced young man, a Williams College sophomore, earning his slow way to a degree. He leaned from the casement, sending out his summons, and in response thirty or forty young people of varying ages trooped into the schoolhouse.

"That's teacher," explained Mary Ann, "William B. Rockwell."

She was relieved to have Phoebe take the initia-

tive as soon as they had entered the room. The new pupil told her name and her brother's, what they had studied and how far they were advanced, while the young man listened, smiling, and seemed in no haste to end the conversation, although it was time for school to begin.

"She's going to be his pet," Mary Ann confided to Gitty behind the cover of Cobbe's Speller.

Matt Hager fixed his gray eyes on the teacher, whom Almiran Sweet was watching no less intently. They had seldom seen William B. Rockwell in so affable a mood. But Phe was very pretty. The pure oval of her upturned face, the fine line of her profile, the deep blue eyes, and the rich brown hair were good to look at. And William B. Rockwell was young.

A spitball struck the teacher on the throat. As if the touch were a signal he was transformed from a private citizen to a public official. Seizing his ruler, he thumped upon the scarred red desk behind which he sat. The buzzing room sank instantly into order and silence. Heads fell in the strictest devotion over books whose owners swayed back and forth in their study. Phe sought a place among the girls at one side of the room.

The pupils sat facing the wall, where ran desks of the rudest description, while the benches were of planks which must be stepped over from the back, or the long seat entered from either end. Allie, among the smaller students, noisily conned Peter Parley's Geography. Phe was introduced to the day's lesson in dumb show by Mary Ann, and

fell to ciphering, Dayboll's Arithmetic propped up before her. Mr. Rockwell summoned a class to recite, and the hum of memorizing went up from the seats.

Presently the instructor, moved by much smearing of Phe's slate and many piteous glances, tip-toed to her side, and bending over her shoulder began in an undertone instructing her in the process by which she was bewildered. The girls near her leaned forward to titter. Omar Mix winked at Almiran.

With great precision a spitball hit Mr. Rockwell on the left cheek from one side of the room as another resounded upon the right from the opposite direction. He stood straight, glaring about him. According to a superstition common to the age and the type, William B. Rockwell was endowed with eyes in the back of his head. Yet perhaps in this instance they were not required.

"Mathice Hager and Almiran Sweet," he said, "go to the stove."

The two tall fellows, not in the least embarrassed, rose and walked across the room. Out of the sunshine, the sharp spring air still demanded artificial heat. The box stove sputtered with its burden of burning wood. The young men threw themselves at full length upon the floor, thrusting their heads underneath the stove. A subdued sound arose as if they were talking together, while their outstretched bodies obtruded upon an already crowded space. They made no effort to dispose of

themselves less obtrusively, and Mr. Rockwell was soon forced to say, —

“Mathice Hager and Almiran Sweet may toe the crack and stoop over.”

The young men forthwith drew their triumphant faces into view, shrugged themselves to their full height, and striding to the seam in the floor indicated by a level forefinger, placed their feet exactly in position so that the toes touched the line, and no more. Giving a last scrutiny to the room before they swung their bodies so that the heads drooped to the floor, both spied Mr. Rockwell beaming upon Phœbe at the foot of the spelling class.

“I bet he’s going to keep company with her,” murmured Almiran.

“I bet he won’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because I’m going to keep company with her myself.”

Almiran gave a grunt. Mr. Rockwell heard it and opened his mouth for a rebuke. His eyes were attracted first to the face of the clock, and he announced recess.

The children rushed from the room in tumultuous disorder, the older pupils following more leisurely to show that they were in no such haste for amusement. Yet Phe was soon swept into play in which they all participated. She joined a circle moving about Omar Mix, while girls’ unruly sopranos mingled with the squeak and growl of boys’ changing voices in the words: —

"There she stands, the handsome creature.
Whom she is I do not know.
I admire her for her beauty.
Let her answer, Yes or No."

Like most of the young people of her day Phe was thoroughly grounded in the principles of proper speech, however far any of them might err in practice. And that "intransitive verbs require the same case after as before them when both words refer to the same person or thing" was imprinted not alone upon her memory, but also on her conversation.

"Oh, hear to Phe Colton!" cried Caty Acker. "She says, 'Who she is I do not know.'"

Those who caught the criticism laughed derisively. Phe blushed to her forehead. She was learning the power of a popular cry. After that she sang "Whom she is" with the others.

In the constant change among the occupants of the ring's position of honor, Matt Hager had now been stationed there. Phe's attention was distracted by the fault found with her diction. She was looking after Allie, too, who was playing tag near by. She was all unprepared when two hands were laid in gentle firmness upon her shoulders. She was pulled slightly forward. A face bent to touch her own. Mathice kissed her upon the mouth.

With a stifled cry the girl shrank from him. She heard as if it were part of a nightmare the shrill mirth of her companions. To most of us the awaking from childhood came not by a friendly

touch, but with some such rude handling. Phœbe had played kissing games before this, but — she realized now — that was as a little girl. It was the first caress of youth that burned upon her lips.

Matt paid as scant heed as she to the amused hubbub about them. "I beg your pardon," said he involuntarily. He had never until then asked forgiveness of anything on earth.

"It was my fault," stammered Phe, falling back from the circle. "I had no right to take part if — if I felt like that. Oh, please," he was following her abashed retreat, "please go on with the rest. Only — I can't play any more."

"Come, Phe," called many voices. "It's your turn to be in the ring."

"We are n't playing," Matt announced coolly. "You go ahead. Phe and I want to have a little talk."

The girl was seated on the exposed roots of a pine-tree, where he proceeded to make a place for himself. As he did so, as he stooped his tall head under the sweeping branches, there was a slight sidewise motion of his figure, a trick of recovering its balance by an equally abrupt gesture. It was all bewilderingly familiar to Phe.

She fixed her blue eyes upon him. The misery of their recent relation, the foolish game, and the young man's offense were lost for the moment in this confusion of remembrance. "Where have I seen you before?" she demanded.

Matt gave a conscious laugh. "You saw me in school," he answered. "Of course."

"Oh, not there. Somewhere, sometime, we two have met." In his silence she pursued her inquiry, still studying his features. "Don't you feel it too, — as if you had seen me before to-day?"

Matt gathered up a handful of needles and began the construction of a chain. He did not return her look. The reticence in his manner increased Phe's curiosity.

"Have n't you seen me too?" she repeated.

He flung away the pine needles. Turning full upon her he gazed straight into her eyes. "Yes," he answered deliberately. "And I've thought of you ever since."

She sprang to her feet, flushing hotly. This was so much more than she had expected. "Where was it?" rather faintly she queried.

"Ah, that," said Matt with a light laugh, "is my secret. I could n't tell you that."

Mr. Rockwell now appeared at the door. Recess was over.

At the first clang of the bell he held, it clashed upon another sound. There was the blast of a dinner horn.

The teacher's arm dropped in a gesture of despair. He watched, as if prepared for resignation, the immediate response. Every young man, some of the girls, many of the little boys, answered. In one moment they had fled. In another they disappeared from sight.

Surveying the few pupils who remained he said, "You may as well go home, children. There will be no more school to-day."

Phe had seized upon her brother, thus restraining him from following the others. "What was it?" he asked querulously, as if the world owed him an explanation. "What is it all about?"

Mr. Rockwell heard and answered, if that could be called an answer which Allie in no wise understood:—

"It was a warning that the sheriff's men are out; a warning, and a call to the Indians."

Thereupon he went into the schoolhouse, slamming the door behind him.

CHAPTER IV

VISITORS

Many elephants cannot wade the river. The mosquito says it is only knee-deep. — *Bengal Proverb.*

WHEN Allie rushed in upon the family, breathless and eager to recount the adventures of his first day at school, the doctor, even with his superior information concerning life at Farley, could say little to satisfy the child's curiosity.

"Those men we saw in their mummery, Phe — you remember? They call themselves Indians. Foolish fellows! The Legislature passed an act against disguises, this winter, aimed at the Anti-renters. They break the law every time they trick themselves out in that fashion. Their summons, I suspect, is to defy the sheriff. They seem beside themselves. The end is inevitable. The governor will call for troops to stamp out the insurrection. They know they can't fight the State, and yet they will assuredly provoke it to act."

"Oh, dear," Phe reflected, "and he went right into the danger! He is so reckless."

A girl rarely thinks the worse of a man because he is reckless. And already Matt Hager was He to Phœbe.

She awaited apprehensively her father's return

from his afternoon round of visits, sure that he would bring news of what had occurred that morning. When his man, Henry Fisher, drove into the grassy dooryard, Phe ran out to meet him. "Where is father?" she called. "Has anything happened?"

Henry was a sheep-faced young fellow, grinning at a word and blushing to the roots of his blue-white hair. He turned scarlet at Phe's appearance, and his broad smile widened.

"You're turrible scairt about your father," said he. "They ain't nothin' gone wrong. He jes' stopped a' Widder Fincks's down the road a ways. He ast me to drive along home an' tell the folks not 'o wait supper. He ain't hurt."

"And," Phe hesitated, stroking the horse's sleek side, "what was the matter this morning, Henry? Was *anybody* hurt?"

Henry glanced helplessly towards the kitchen door. It was a family saying that he had no opinions until Jemima Lane examined them and they were pronounced genuine. Fortunately, at this juncture, Jemima appeared on the back porch, her apron thrown over her head. "You back?" she remarked by way of salutation.

Henry grinned an assent.

"What was they of that horn blowin'?"

Forthwith the man's tongue was loosened.

"You never see sech works," said he. "The depity an' his men was set on to Jurimy Loucks's. They was as many as twenty Injuns. They carried rifles, an' they acted ugly. Snyder an' his men

they run like all git out. From there they went to Michel Enders's. 'Tain't far from Loucks's. An' Enders he blowed his horn so 't the Injuns come ag'in — strong. They must 'a' been thirty — forty on 'em. What ye s'pose they done? They took Tobe Snyder an' hove him down an' set on him. He could n't budge to help hisself. Nor his men they could n't do nothin' nuther, four to one ag'in 'em. I guess they was putty well scairt, Snyder an' 'mongst 'em. The upshot was they lef' Enders's, too."

Phe regarded Henry's foolish smile with a terrified fascination. "But," she faltered, "that was resisting the law. Won't they be punished?"

"Why, Phœbe," urged the man, "they was masked. Nobody can't tell who they be. O' course they 'd be arrested if they should git ketched. But who's goin' to ketch 'em when they can't tell who they be?"

He was so confident of his position that he dared maintain it in Jemima's very presence. He assumed that her silence gave him sanction. But she broke that silence. "What's to hender their bein' ketched?" she queried sternly. "Take a town o' this size, an' forty — fifty men in it luggin' a secret 'round, I guess 't won't be long before it's plain enough who they be. In half a hunderd men they's bound to be one tattler."

Her sharp voice seemed to tear Henry's boastful assertions into shreds. Phœbe shivered, and began her retreat to the house from the chill of the evening air. Henry called "Git ap" to Sam, taking his

revenge as he drove past the girl by muttering for her ear alone, —

“Ef they was a woman ’mongst them Injuns — I guess the town would ring with the names of ’em all by cockerow.”

He might have known!

“A woman!” echoed Jemima Lane before the last phrase left his lips. “A woman, says I! Gimme a passel o’ men for spreadin’ news. Gimme a man gossip an’ he beats creation. Now you take that hoss along to the barn, an’ put him out quick’s ye can. Supper’s ready an’ waitin’. Where’s the doctor?”

Henry repeated his master’s message.

“For all that,” declared Jemima authoritatively, “he ain’t goin’ without a meal o’ vittles. Not while he’s clos’t to hand. Allie, lemme have the horn.”

She called to the child within the house, who brought her a great tin horn from its nail behind the door. Jemima raised it to her lips, blowing a mighty blast.

“That’ll bring him,” she observed in satisfaction, and carried it back to its place.

After their lessons were learned that night Phe and Allie strayed out of doors again. The sounds and scents of early spring drew them. The frogs in the meadow called them. That first faint tracery of green outlining bough and bush waved to them. The house was as a prison. They found their wraps, and the doctor silenced Mrs. Colton’s remonstrance with “Oh, let them go. They will

run about enough to keep warm. And the evening is perfect."

So the little boy and the tall girl swung on the gate and chattered idly together while the twilight lingered and the stars came out in the clear, pale sky. Allie related to his sister the unabridged details of a muskrat hunt which had occupied that afternoon. Phe gave him a divided attention.

"Hark!" she interrupted at last. "What's that? Don't you hear something?"

"Something? I hear all sorts of things, — the tree-toads, and a cow mooing, and — Oh, that!"

He clasped her hand tightly.

Along the road came the thud, thud of horses' feet, many horses nearing them at a gallop. It had been an exciting day, and Phoebe and the child were both unnerved. They clung to each other, staring with frightened eyes in the direction of the sound.

As it grew louder it brought Dr. Colton and his wife to the door, the little woman shrinking into the shadow of the self-reliant man, they two acting the part they had always played together. Henry followed Jemima Lane around the corner of the house. No one spoke.

And now they could see what approached them. A score of men were charging down the quiet road. Their horses were fantastically trapped in blankets that grazed the ground, the head concealed except for the eyes and ears and nose. The riders wore long blouses of flowered chintz, with horsehair

plumes or nodding feathers stuck in their hair. All were masked.

Allie began to whimper. No one else made a sound. Phe knelt beside him, taking the boy in her arms. She tried to speak, to comfort him, but her lips were dry and stiff. The words would not come from her throat.

The leader of the band drew his rein at the gate. He swung himself to the ground, followed by one after another of his companions, until some half dozen had alighted. The others halted, but sat still, statues of folly, regarding the scene through those owl-like eyes of their masks.

As the gate opened Allie uttered a gasp of horror. But he whirled about valiantly in Phe's embrace.

"You good-for-nothing Indians," said he, "don't you dare to touch my sister."

The men laughed constrainedly. The foremost lifted a voice inartistically disguised. "Is that Dr. Colton in the door? We want to see Dr. Colton."

"Here I am," answered the doctor. He came to the head of the short flight of steps.

His wife cried out. Phœbe and Allie with trembling courage ran up the path to station themselves at his side. Jemima and Henry were already there.

"Nobody means to hurt him," two or three men assured them in gruff or falsetto tones. "Don't be scared. We're only going to have a little talk with the doctor."

"What are you going to say?"

"This much." The leader advanced until he stood alone in the gravel walk, facing that group on the stairs above him. "Doc, you don't want to blow that dinner horn again."

"Oh, I don't?" The doctor's eyebrows rose quizzically. "Why don't I?"

"Because the Indians say you sha'n't. That's why."

"Gentlemen," the mild tone inquired, "what is your objection to my dinner horn?"

"You know well enough," the leader rejoined. "It's our signal. We can't afford to be fooled with false alarms. We don't allow any horns to be blown in Farley, not unless they mean the one thing. Do you understand?"

"Not quite," said the doctor. "What is the one thing?"

"A warning that the sheriff has come."

"Ah!"

"Now do you understand?"

"Apparently," Dr. Colton answered, "you do not understand me. Gentlemen, my dinner horn shall blow whenever, and for whatever reason, my family think best. I bid you all good-evening."

He would have left them, had not an exclamation from the leader arrested him: "Wait a minute. Not so fast, if you please. Do you suppose that ends the matter?"

"It does so far as I am concerned," was the indifferent reply.

"Then, by jingo, it don't end it as far as we're concerned."

"Very well."

"You shall hear from us, doc."

"Very well."

"Let's see if you say, 'Very well' this time next fall. Hey, boys?"

There was a hoarse chorus of assent. Phœbe, shaking in her clutch upon Jemima's steady arm, noticed one figure near the leader, a figure that, a cold grasp at her heart told her, had something in its bearing which — again — she recognized. This man, she saw, was not only ill at ease, but he failed to join in the muttered assurance.

In the interest of the moment no one had heard signs of interruption until the guard in the road hissed a warning as the rattle of wheels drew nearer. A trim little buggy with two horses was bowling along the road.

"Whoa, boys," said the driver curtly.

Two men leaped from the carriage. The Indians gave a common cry of vexation, most of them forgetting their affected speech. Phe knew the voice of the man near her — the man who had been ill at ease — when he grumbled under his breath but distinctly, "What ill wind blew them here?"

The newcomers were a dapper, big-headed strippling and an elderly man of commanding presence. "What is the matter?" he asked peremptorily, as he stalked along the path, followed by the youth. "You are up to no mischief, I hope?"

"No, no, Squire," the chief speaker assured him, "we are all right. We were just paying doc here a friendly visit. We have n't touched him."

"Ah! So this is the new doctor." He advanced to the lowest step, and reached up his hand. "I am Mark Mayham, at your service, Dr. Colton." Then first spying Mrs. Colton he removed his high silk hat with a quaint stateliness. "I beg your pardon, madam. I had no idea there were ladies present."

The doctor named his companions. Esquire Mayham ceremoniously presented the friend with him as Demosthenes Mix.

At the name Phe regarded the spruce little man more attentively. She found that he was peering through the dusk at her.

"I trust our good offices are not required," he said in a mincing attempt at precision. "Boys," addressing the Indians, "of course you understand that the law is set at defiance by your disguise. You are aware that I could see every one of you in jail. I hold you in the hollow of my hand."

There was a yell of derision.

"Boys," repeated the man Phe had been watching, "don't you feel pretty small? Mossy Mix is holding us in the hollow of his hand."

He mimicked the high-pitched tone, but through his words Phœbe heard the deeper voice of Mathice Hager.

"You may jeer now," Demosthenes called above another shout, "yet you know that I speak the truth. You Indians are going straight to destruction."

"We're going straight to our homes at present," retorted the leader, facing his men. "I'm sure

we're obligated for your interest, Mossy. It's very kind. And, doc, you remember all I said."

"Oh, yes," assented the doctor, "I shall remember."

"May I ask what it was about?" inquired the squire. "Your dinner horn, perhaps?"

"Yes. They say I sha'n't blow it."

"And what do you say?"

"That I shall."

"You are altogether in the right," Squire Mayham decided.

At this, another outcry arose from the Indians, an interjection of surprise. "Why, how is that?" demanded the leader. "I thought you were with us, heart and soul."

"No, my friend." The carefully modulated voice neither rose nor fell in its earnestness. "I sympathize with the cause of Anti-rent. I believe that I have a legal and a moral claim to the land my forefathers occupied for generations. But I never held, and I do not hold to-night, any such view as you have come here to enforce. It is monstrous that you should interfere in the private affairs of a private citizen. I rejoice to see this stranger among us assert his independence and his manhood. Dr. Colton, I congratulate you upon the course you have pursued."

The doctor himself had taken his position from an impulse, a swift decision that the time for acquiescence was past, that he could be no plaything of popular feeling. He knew one of the rare pure joys of earth as he confronted his enemies,

clasping the hand Squire Mayham stretched out to him.

"I, likewise, approve of your action *in toto*," Demosthenes Mix assured him, his eyes on Phœbe's face.

Matt Hager crossed over to the leader, murmuring something in his ear. The man thereupon gruffly gave an order to depart. "But we sha'n't forget you, doc," he announced by way of farewell. "No, nor yet you, squire."

"I am not afraid of you," Demosthenes called after them, — "not in the least afraid."

"You've no need to be," was the rejoinder. "We're fighting men, sonny. We would n't go to touch you."

With this the Indians cantered away.

CHAPTER V

GENERAL TRAINING

One dupe is as impossible as one twin. — JOHN STERLING.

"I'LL drive up clos't to the green," said Henry Fisher, "so as ye can all git out 'fore I take the hosses to the tavern and bait 'em."

Farley was a town of farms. The sleepy Main Street contained but a score or so of buildings clustered about the green. Here the visiting circus raised its tent, here the oration was delivered on Independence Day, and here naturally was the spot selected for General Training.

This was a school holiday, and although Dr. Colton, who was exempt from military duties, had gone as usual about his round of visits, he was too merciful to his children to require the services of either, while Henry was a militiaman. He wore no uniform. Members of the Goodwood Company of Farley were to be seen coming together from every direction, but, save for the captain and his first lieutenant, whose absurd garments were of antique make, and except for the second lieutenant's sash and sabre, there was nothing in the men's dress to indicate that they were soldiers. Many of them bore no weapon more

formidable than a stick. General Training was fading into a listless form preserved as an excuse for one of the country's few merrymakings. All dread of war, all belief in the need of preparation, had died from the minds of men. And the secession of the Southern States was but fifteen years in the future.

Allie sprang over the back of the wagon, darting away into the increasing crowd. Jemima climbed stiffly from her own chair and helped Mrs. Colton to descend to the ground, while Phe pushed these seats aside.

"Now you be round," Jemima addressed Henry sternly, "the minute you 're dismissed for noonin'. We ain't goin' to wait for ye. I tell ye that. Ye won't git a mouffle unless you 're here."

"All right," he assented. "I'll be round," and drove away.

Phœbe was captured at once by some of the friends she had made at school. She saw her mother, attended by Jemima, comfortably established under one of the maples that bordered the great lawn. Then the knot of girls wandered up and down the board walk, giggling and whispering and coquetting with the youths who hung about them waiting for the sergeant to "fall in" his men.

Presently the rattle of the drum called the company into line, such a line! Crooked, wavering, the militia, awkward individually and collectively, faced the right and swayed from one foot to the other in preparation for the march. Fife notes

pierced the air in an unintentional variation of Yankee Doodle. They drew the Goodwood Company after them. Up the street tramped the men, cheered on by accompanying boys and by the waving handkerchiefs of women.

"Don't he look nice?" said Gitty Hager in Phe's ear.

"Splendid," was the ready answer. "I think he looks the best of anybody. But then all the rest are horrid."

"Oh, I don't know about that." Gitty's lips pouted. "Matt looks kind of nice."

Phœbe unclasped her friend's hand to stare at her. "Why, I meant Matt!"

"Did you?" with a foolish smile. "I was talking about Almiran."

When the company was countermarched it returned to the green, where various evolutions were displayed with more or less hesitancy, but to uncritical observers. "I don't see," said Jemima Lane to Mrs. Colton, "but Henery does as good as any of 'em — considerin'."

The signal for dismissal was followed by Henry's prompt return to their group. The habit of obedience and fear of Jemima combined to keep him from those few who surrounded the farm wagon whence its owner was dispensing home-made spruce beer. Principle restrained him from following the many who flocked to the bar-room of the tavern. Intemperance was common in these days, but Henry was a Washingtonian and had signed the pledge.

Yet Jemima's sharp eyes noticed, while they carried their basket to a point of comparative seclusion, that her fellow-servant was absent-minded and constrained, "kind o' sly," she called it to herself. She had seen much whispering carried on in the ranks; Henry had been drawn aside and buttonholed more than once. Something was astir that June morning, and evidently young Fisher was a party to it. Jemima decided not to leave him alone for an instant.

"Land knows what mischief the poor fool would get into without me," her reflection ran.

Throughout the morning Allie had been eating whenever he could coax a cooky from his mother, and Phœbe carried off her choice of their bountiful provision — fat cucumber pickles and soft molasses cakes were all she wished — to devour in the society of her schoolmates. Perhaps in attaching herself to Gitty she had a hope that Mathice might join them, — sisters do serve such useful purposes in this world. But the young man seemed pointedly to avoid any company of which Phœbe formed a part.

Under these circumstances a girl always considers herself the sufficient reason. "What have I done?" is her first question. Yet, as is also usual, Matt's shyness came from causes wherein Phœbe personally had no share.

They two had scarcely seen each other since the night of the Indians' warning. Spring work came on, and Matt was kept from school. He was too tired to take part in the rare festivities of the

neighborhood, while they never met at church. During those weeks it had been partly a general absorption in farm duties, partly Matt's strong personality which had, so far, protected the threatened men from harm, and, while consorting with those who bore her father an implacable ill-will, he was ashamed to face the daughter. He felt the girl insulted, too, by the look and the laugh that followed his protests against a raid on Dr. Colton. His fellow rioters could comprehend interference in favor of Squire Mayham, who was Matt's distant cousin. But why should he stand between them and the new physician, if it were not for the sake of a pretty girl?

To-day there was still further cause for him to stand aloof. Old Jacob Hager was, in local parlance, "well off." His only son had not finished working out his time. Money was scarce in a community relying largely upon a system of exchange, and even the smallest coin seldom fell into Mathice's hand. He was too proud to stroll with Phe past the wagon where root-beer was sold, or by the booth, displaying in irresistible temptation slabs of golden gingerbread, glasses of lemonade, and a jar of pink and white peppermint sticks. Matt stalked about the green during nooning, neither touching the luncheon with which his mother had filled his pockets, nor paying more than indifferent heed to the stir and conference among his friends.

After an hour's rest the drum again summoned the company together. It marched and counter-

marched, wheeled right and left, charged bayonets, and at four o'clock was disbanded.

Now wagons began to collect from the tavern stables, the militiamen to gather together their families preparatory to adjournment to the fair ground, where the day was to conclude with horseraces. Henry Fisher, one of the minority who were going directly home, was as impatient in his easy way as if the expedition had been against his wishes, — altogether to please the others, who, having effected their purpose, must allow him his tardy rights.

"Can't fool no more time away," he remonstrated. "Why don't you folks hurry up? I got 'o git home an' tend to my chores."

"Well, nobuddy's hinderin' ye," snapped Jemima Lane. She, also, was tired and cross. "We're ready, land knows. Where's Phœbe?"

"No, Phœbe ain't here, nuther," Henry complained. "Now I got 'o wait for her, I s'pose."

"Phe told me she would walk home," Mrs. Colton's mild voice interjected. "Several of the girls went her way. I saw them starting off some time ago."

Allie fell to whining at this. He wished to walk and overtake Phœbe. His mother's attention was distracted in soothing him, or she might have observed the group of young folks on a by-path across the fields that bordered the turnpike, now deep in dust. The half dozen friends soon parted from one another, as their ways led in various directions. Phe was presently left with Gitty,

then, from the bars in Hager's meadow lot, quite alone.

"I don't see what was the matter with the boys to-night," was Gitty's valedictory. "Pretty cool of 'em, I think, to let us go home by ourselves. Every one of 'em disappeared the minute they was disbanded. Did you see that?"

"Yes," said Phœbe.

She toiled up the slope on the farther side of the rail fence, her eyes fixed on the grove of maples that crowned the summit, her mind busy with the events of a tedious holiday, her step lagging as she became fully aware how dull the hours had been. So tired she was that, on reaching the crown of the hill, she threw herself upon the ground, at the foot of a large tree, and leaned her head against its trunk to rest for a stolen instant before taking up her lonely walk. The twilight was long, in those longest days, and she had a mile still to go. There was sufficient time that she might afford to waste a little here, and she was weary.

The twigs snapped, and the dry leaves crackled in the wood beyond. Phe heard the tramp of a cow and its moo calling its calf. She paid no attention to the sounds, nor their nearness.

"Fetch him over here," directed an unnatural bass voice. "Here, where there's a clearing. Now, boys, make a bonfire, quick."

There ensued a curious, stifled murmur. Some one seemed trying vainly to protest. It was followed by two or three falsely pitched voices, and the dragging of a reluctant burden pulled roughly

through the underbrush. Phe leaned forward, looking around the tree-trunk that concealed her from view.

In the heart of the little grove was a depression almost free from shrubs and trees. Here some half-score men, in the already familiar disguise, were tying Job Ecker, the constable, to a stout oak. A handkerchief was bound across his mouth, although his hands had been left free. Having firmly secured him here the Indians proceeded to build a fire close by, so close that Phe, her cheeks white with horror, supposed they meant to burn him, and the victim uttered for himself a choked remonstrance.

"Oh, shut up, Job," cried one of his captors. "Do you think we're going to cook you? How you act! Throw them papers in the fire. That's all we want."

Job shook his head.

"You won't?"

Job shook his head again.

"Now I'm speaking honest and truly," said the leader. "We ain't disposed to hurt nobody, and we don't mean to hurt you. But you got to burn them papers."

Job mumbled something Phe could not catch.

"Oh, darn your duty to the State," was the careless rejoinder. "Ain't a man's first duty to his wife and family? How will they like it if you're brought back to 'em with your skin het off with boilin' tar? Say, how will they like that?"

"How will Job Ecker like it?" another ques-

tioned, laughing. Phœbe recognized that laugh. It was Omar Mix who spoke.

At a nod from his leader he set a kettle on the fire, beginning to stir its odorous contents. "I guess on the whole Job's the main person to consider," he remarked while thus engaged.

"Will you do it?" asked the first speaker.

"Do what?" the constable whispered thickly.

"Burn them papers."

Still he shook his head.

"Haul off his boots, boys. Fill 'em with tar. Let him have a taste of what we mean."

Omar and three others sprang forward. They knelt before the wriggling figure and gave a tug at his feet. Job uttered a terrible, muffled shriek.

It roused in the frightened girl, cowering in her shelter, the spirit of justice that is, for its instant, stronger than any other sensation in the mind of man. She forgot her weakness, forgot all that went to make up the situation, all save that this poor creature, dully obedient to his trust, stood there alone, outnumbered. Scrambling to her feet she sprang to the hollow's rim.

"Stop!" she screamed.

Omar and his mates fell back. The others started, grasping at their guns.

"Stop!" Phœbe cried once more.

They looked whence came the mysterious interruption. Outlined against a leafy background was the slight and rigid form, the face brilliant with righteous anger, above an outstretched, menacing arm.

"Unbind that man!" she commanded. "Let him go! If you do him harm, if you touch him again to hurt him, I shall tell the authorities what I know."

The Indians glared at her, speechless yet with surprise.

"I can swear to one of you," said Phœbe. "Loose the constable or, so help me Heaven, I will betray the man I know."

They saw that they were truly at her mercy. The very vagueness of the accusation, no less than the melodramatic quality of her excitement, intensified their fear.

"Let him go," directed the leader gruffly.

Phœ stood — shaking with terror she stood her ground — till Job Ecker had shaken himself like a Newfoundland dog, and trudged off along the path. Then she, likewise, turned and fled.

At break-neck speed she ran over the brow of the hill, back on the way she had come, anywhere to leave those dreadful men, to find shelter and protection from them. How had she dared do this thing? How could she ask what she had asked — prove her strength against their own?

The more horrid thought hid its head for a time, although in the end it must be dragged to the light. Had Matt Hager been among those others? Would he suppose that he had been recognized, that she threatened to surrender him to punishment?

A house nestled in the lowland across the sloping fields. It loomed up to welcome her as she

passed the barn. She stumbled at the porch, she staggered with fatigue, throwing her weight against the door.

"Let me in," she gasped.

Hurried steps sounded across the floor. A hand lifted the latch. The door was flung wide open. Matt Hager stood on the sill.

"Oh, thank God!" cried Phœbe.

CHAPTER VI

OLD JACOB AT HOME

Self-satisfaction is usually found in its highest perfection in narrow minds and narrow lives. — PHILIP GILBERT HAMERTON.

"You!" Mathice exclaimed.

In the next instant, at sight of the girl's white face he added, "What is the matter? Have you been frightened?"

He seemed, as Phe realized, to understand something of what had happened. Still, evidently, he had not been a participant in the attack upon the constable. Out of her deep relief Phe spoke.

"It was nothing. Yes, I was frightened, but it was at nothing. May I come in, and — and see Gitty?"

"Come in? Of course you may," the young host answered eagerly, closing the door behind them. "Mother! Gitty! Here is company."

From an outer room, the buttery, Gitty appeared carrying a pitcher of milk, and followed by a meek, shy little woman whom Phoebe relieved the embarrassment of the others by immediately greeting as Mrs. Hager.

"I am afraid I have come at an inconvenient time," said she. "I saw some rough men, on my way home, and I ran back, without thinking, to

the nearest house. Please forgive me for making use of you like this."

Phe was secretly vexed. They would be forced to invite her to supper, — it was quite supper time, — and then Matt must act as her escort. She resented thrusting herself upon any one, upon Mathice Hager of all persons. But Phœbe was, as Jemima Lane often told Henry, "a perfect little lady," and she concealed her annoyance under what was reckoned only proper hesitation.

"It don't make a bit of difference," Gitty civilly declared in conjunction with Matt's reassurance, —

"You're as welcome as you can be. Stay to tea, Phœbe, and afterwards I'll wait on you home."

With masculine disregard of details, this plan struck him as peculiarly delightful. He paid no attention to his sister's slight reluctance in repeating the hospitable offer. Once Gitty had partaken of a meal at the doctor's house, and "they live so nice," she reflected bitterly, while she was removing Phe's bonnet, — that being an accepted method of welcoming a guest. She wished with all her heart this had not happened so. Mrs. Hager also, having brought to her husband's home traditions of a freer and finer life, hesitated in the entertainment of the prettily behaved young girl. She thought nervously of her husband. Mathice thought only of Phe.

While the little group still stood around the entrance door, it flew open, and the master of the

house came in. Phe knew who he must be, although she had never seen him before, and despite the lack of resemblance between the father and his children. He was a small, wiry man, with a shriveled face and bent shoulders, an overbearing bluster about him that proclaimed this insignificant-looking person a tyrant over every being and every thing in his household. He regarded Phe with the rough curiosity of an untrained nature acknowledged to be eccentric.

"Who's that?" he blurted out.

Gitty and Mathice stepped forward together, one on either side of the stranger. "This is Miss Colton, father," the young man began hurriedly. "Dr. Colton's daughter. She has come to visit us."

"I see she has," said old Jacob in uncouth pleasantry, rude merely because he was old Jacob and a sharp answer was expected of him. He took a fancy, however, to Phœbe. The lovely face and the gentle air of good breeding had their effect upon him. He allowed Phe to lay her hand in his, although he did not know what to do with it.

"I fled to you for shelter, Mr. Hager." The girl repeated her story. "I was scared by some men as I was going through Sweet's Woods, and I ran to the nearest house. I was sure you would let me in."

Gitty and Matt trembled alike at any speech with their father, uncertain as to his response. Phe's tact, on the other hand, had guessed that he would be flattered by her appeal. And he was.

"That's all right," he growled. "Mother, ain't we goin' to have any supper to-night?"

He moved away from the others, ashamed already of even so much politeness, and, in addressing his wife, he flung the question at her over his shoulder. He seldom looked at those to whom he spoke, but that was true of most of his associates. To control the eyes is the last result of social ease.

"There is one thing," Phoebe casually observed, crossing to the window; "the twilights are so long now that I can surely get home before it is dark."

She gazed out on the stretch of quiet field and the curve of roadway, as if the picture were of moment to her and she had not turned her back to the kitchen to allow her hostesses a chance to work unwatched. Matt joined her directly, beginning to talk with animation, and endeavoring to divert her attention from his father. Jacob had seated himself on the edge of a bed in a curtained recess of the kitchen, and proceeded to pull off his boots, kicking them out of sight. He thereupon strode forward in his blue yarn stockings and viewed the round table which his daughter pulled out from the wall, letting down its snow-white top.

"Goin' to have s'pawn?" he asked sharply.

The corners of Gitty's mouth drooped. She did think they might have a decent supper for Phoebe Colton. But years ago Maria Hager had dashed her hopes too often against that iron will to have one left alive. She made a deprecating gesture of entreaty.

"Yes," said Gitty sullenly.

She dared not spread a cloth on the table. She brought presently and thumped down upon it a huge pan of bubbling mush. She set beside it the pitcher of milk, counted out five pewter spoons from the holder in the cupboard, and called in a sulky voice : —

“S’paw’n’s ready, Matt.”

Phœbe felt the discomfort in the atmosphere without seeing Matt’s frown or Gitty’s confusion. She followed the young man to the table and took her designated chair with outward unconcern. Mrs. Colton was a housekeeper whom even Jemima Lane, herself a marvel of cleanliness, declared “pernickety.” Fifty years ago niceness had not summoned to its aid the present fear of disease. “Dirt is healthy” was a common belief, and Phe’s repugnance was not on the score of hygiene when she saw she was to dip her spoon into the pan of suppawn from which old Jacob ate greedily. But by disposition and training she was too fastidious for appetite under these conditions, and only a tender heart, that could not by fending for itself pain others, forced her to swallow some portion of the mush. Old Jacob gulped down his food with voracity. Simple as were his tastes, they did not always require such fare. His demand for it had been but one more manifestation of his power, a defiant endeavor toward the ease he was far from feeling. Uncomfortable in the distress of his family and disposed to punish them for the annoyance, between his noisy mouthfuls he grunted in Phe’s direction, —

"Dr. Colton 's an Uprenter, ain't he?"

"Don't you know he is?" returned the girl.

Her clear, quiet tone, her dignity of resentment, awed the uncouth man. "I've heard folks say so," he replied in a less abusive manner, "but you can't believe all you hear."

Phœbe brushed aside this platitude. Matt, who had opened his lips to an angry retort, closed them again. She could take care of herself, and was much better left alone.

"I can't believe any one," Phe persisted, "is in doubt as to my father's opinions. He is a brave man, and speaks them even when he is threatened with violence for not holding the popular belief."

Her voice shook. The apprehension under which they had lived for the past few weeks told on her, and, very womanlike, even though she were partaking of their bounty, Phe made these Down-renters pay something in atonement for her suffering. Matt held his head haughtily. His father grinned.

"Gimme some sugar 'n' milk," said he, ignoring the innuendo.

Gitty looked sulkier than ever. She pushed back her chair, disappeared into the buttery, and soon emerged, bearing a wooden bowl of clotted milk. It was sprinkled thickly with shavings of maple sugar; and with it Gitty set on the bare white table another dish with an additional supply of the sugar. She then resumed her seat, down-cast and sullen. What would Phe Colton think of such a way of living?

Phoebe certainly was not disposed to plunge her spoon once more into the common food. Yet she followed the example set her, taking up with each portion a very little thickened milk, and adding sweetening liberally as it disappeared. Old Jacob still ate heartily. Gitty and Matt made no further pretense, and Mrs. Hager and their guest did not affect the gusto of the head of the house. Even his enjoyment, real or fictitious, presently ceased. Scraping his chair over the uncarpeted floor, he left the table without a word and strode across the room. From the chimney-corner he called, addressing no one by name, —

“Come here an’ set awhile by the fire.”

“Go on,” Gitty whispered to Phe.

There is no conceit so revolting as that of a boor who deems his attention, because it is fickle, a precious gift. Phe understood that the coarse old man was extending to her his notions of hospitality. She wished to reject what was so rudely presented, and yet her innate kindness was reinforced by the imploring faces around her. She followed her host, seating herself by the smouldering embers which, on that June evening, gave out but a pleasant heat in the dreary north room.

“What an immense fireplace!” she exclaimed at random, thinking she must contribute to the conversation.

Matt was lifting the suppawn kettle from its crane. “Is n’t it?” said he, smiling brightly as he knelt on the hearth. “It holds a four-foot backlog and a quarter cord of wood. You must visit

us on a winter night and see how we manage to keep warm."

Phe blushed in receiving this invitation, although not more deeply than Matt in extending it. "Thank you," she answered, "I should like to."

Perhaps it was absurd — so Matt concluded — to expect his father to show for his part more civility than a not unamiable grunt over his pipe. Yet everything depended upon his fancy for this girl. The young man told himself passionately that his own future happiness hung upon the impression Phe Colton made on one willfully perverse. So far, and on the whole, it was undoubtedly favorable. To Phe, but dimly appreciating his motive, there was something piteous in his propitiatory manner.

"Father's father built this house," said Matt, rising with the swaying kettle in his hand. "It's got the best timbers of any of the old places round about. Has n't it, father?"

Very few of us can resist the temptation to talk about ourselves. "I guess so," old Jacob responded. "It ought to have. There was good work put into the frame" (he moved his head by an inch or two in Phe's direction). "I quit home," he went on, "'fore I was as old as Matt. My brothers did, too. We all went off and left the old folks; but I come back again. My father he cut a silver dollar into four quarters, and give one to each of his boys. There was four boys. We was to bring it when he died, and show it for our share the property; and we all done it."

"What a pretty way of making a will!" said Phe.

Gitty and her mother had quickly set their household affairs in order. They now came forward to take their seats about the fire.

"Things were different then," old Jacob continued. "I never wore a hat till I was nine years old. No more did my brothers. My father was county judge, too; but he was poor. We never had more'n one pair o' shoes a year, and them we wore a-Sunday. Week days we went barefoot. That was the way we was brought up."

For the first time Phe heard the voice of her hostess. Youthful reminiscences, with a new listener, were so fascinating as to overcome even Mrs. Hager's timidity.

"I remember," she ventured in a quavering tone, "how I used to carry my shoes to town on the Sabbath, and sit down on a log o' wood, just outside the village, and put 'em on, real well. My father did n't wear stockings, nor yet my brothers, and we were well-to-do at our house too."

These revelations caused Gitty to move uneasily on her chair. Matt was more closely concerned in preserving his father's good humor and noting the frown with which Mrs. Hager's interruption was received. The instant her weak voice ceased old Jacob took up his story, a little hurriedly, although otherwise not heeding his wife's remarks.

"Our shoes was tanned at home. We had a big trough out there in the yard," jerking his head to indicate the direction. "It was filled with oak and hemlock bark pounded up. There was just water enough to cover the hides. We boys used

to soak our feet in that water every night. It healed 'em and hardened 'em."

No home training, no goodness of heart, could have quite concealed Phe's disgust with these squalid details. But her affection for Matt Hager could cover even his father's stories.

"And so you inherited the homestead, Mr. Hager," she observed, striving to divert the tide of remembrance into another channel.

There, at least, she succeeded. While Maria Hager and her children gave too late a cry of expostulation, old Jacob sprang upright from his lounging posture.

"Inherit?" he repeated scornfully. "Not an acre, and you know it. All you Uprenters know it. What you're preaching is that I ought 'o grin an' bear it. Don't talk to me about inheriting the homestead when the patroon claims every inch I plough."

Phe had grown pale under the sudden outbreak. Gitty's eyes, Matt's eyes, implored her, but she could not keep silence.

"I beg your pardon," she answered. "You are right to reprove my thoughtlessness. We are so new to Farley that I sometimes forget the conditions here."

Matt began an irrelevant sentence which his father thrust aside. The rent grievances, never far from his mind, had been so violently hurled into it as to do irreparable damage. "I suppose your father forgits sometimes," he sneered, "so 't he pays his rent to the agent whenever it comes due."

Phœbe rose. "It has n't come due yet."

"Don't ye dodge. He will pay it when it does?"

"He is an Uprenter," Phe answered coldly. "I have told you that."

"Don't ye dodge. Is he goin' to pay his rent? That's what I ask ye."

"Some Anti-renters, Phe," Mathice interposed in an urgent tone, "see the wisdom on pay-day of siding with their neighbors."

Still his gaze besought her, and still truth to her father urged her on.

"We are not that sort," she said. "What we Coltons believe, we stand by. Good-night, Mrs. Hager," holding out her hand, "I must be going. Thank you for your kindness. Good-night, Mr. Hager. Good-night, Gitty."

"Come get your bonnet," replied the other girl. Old Jacob had not spoken.

Mrs. Hager followed them in trembling haste into the best room, leaving the two men together. Mathice took his hat from its nail. He was silent, his mouth firmly set. Abruptly Jacob pulled himself up in his chair. Bringing his clinched fist down in a blow upon his thigh, he spoke.

"There don't no more Uprenters ever cross that threshold again. D'ye hear?"

"Yes," said Matt.

"Nor you don't go to them, you and Gitty. I'll see to that. You can take the girl home to-night, but there's the end. We don't have nothin' more to do with Uprenters, nor they don't have nothin' more to do with us. I'll see to that," he repeated.

CHAPTER VII

THE PARTING OF THE WAYS

"This is this to thee, and that to me."

THE two young people walked along the country road, in a silence of bitter abstraction on Matt's part, of embarrassment on Phe's. This was the first time in the girl's experience that a young man had acted as her escort. The courtesy was magnified, in that time and place, into "seeing one home," which generally and further implied "keeping company." She felt conscious, as if the wayside weeds in the angles of the rail fence were full of eyes prying upon the situation.

Mathice was too heavy-hearted for awkwardness. His father's prejudice had set the seal — so he told himself — upon every hope, for they now began and ended in Phe Colton. He never dreamed of defiance. The instinct of obedience, rather than a definite fear of a will that had inexorably wielded his life so far, forced him to surrender all to those hard hands for the future as in the past.

After a little his moodiness became apparent to Phe as he stalked beside her, switching off the heads of straggling daisies with the stick he flour-

ished. She supposed the cause for this ill-humor to lie in the gross manners of old Jacob, to whose vulgarity she likewise attributed that rough behavior at the close of her visit, attaching no further importance to it. From a pure impulse of comfort she suddenly exclaimed, —

“What self-sacrificing lives our forefathers led, Matt! I never appreciated it so fully as when your father and mother were talking to-night.”

“Our forefathers!” Mathice repeated in a sort of scornful tenderness. “That is like you — to make it pleasanter for me by setting yourself on the same level. But you know, and I know, that your stock was different. It is now, and it was then. You’re not made — I can’t put it in the right words, but you’re not made of the same kind of clay.”

“That’s ridiculous,” said Phœbe.

“No, it is n’t. It’s sense. Why, my mother’s grandfather — did you ever hear how he began? They went to housekeeping in a one-room log cabin, with a maple stump in the middle of the floor. They made that into a table. Gran’ther Baldwin smoothed the top with his axe, and hacked out the sides so that he and his wife could draw up to it. He scooped a hollow like a butter-bowl in the centre and two little hollows opposite. They ate from those, and used the big one for a dish. They had Indian pudding for breakfast, and potatoes for dinner, and pudding and potatoes at night. Whenever a child was born gran’ther cut out another hollow in the stump. By and by there were

thirteen. Then they built a new house, and there was a movable table. The younger ones never ate off the stump, but they all remembered hearing about it. There were seventeen children."

Mathice in his turn had often listened to tales of these hardships recounted as a source of pride. He was repeating them now in a stern tone, almost of accusation.

"My grandfather and grandmother Hager," he continued, "when they were married, owned between them nothing but an axe, a bake-kettle, and a bed. Whatever else they wanted they had to make."

Phe's eyes met his in the soft summer dusk. "How splendid!" she murmured.

"Splendid? Don't you see the meanness and the poorness of it?"

"I don't see anything but that it was fine for a man and a woman to be everything to each other," — Phe's voice quavered, and yet it was resolute, — "and to do everything for themselves. That seems like literally beginning the world, forming it, bit by bit, as they went on. I envy them, Matt."

The very height of her spirit, the sentiment alien to his prosaic experience, made him feel the more hopelessly a clodhopper beside her. It choked his speech, and he could only stammer, —

"You're the best girl in the world! To think of your looking at it all like that!"

"I don't see any other way of looking at it," Phe replied rather coldly. She was already somewhat ashamed of her enthusiasm. Mathice might

consider it forward — unmaidenly. Her cheeks burned at the suspicion.

"Where are we?" she demanded, to turn the subject. "I never came into Farley from this direction."

"It's the road over the hill from our farm," Matt answered, thrusting out a timid hand to help her in its descent. He failed to add that it was the longest way between her home and his, and for that reason he had chosen it. "We are just behind the Episcopal church. You will see it in a minute."

He nodded towards where now came into view a small square structure, standing out white against the trees. The long windows were darkened by green Venetian blinds over their clear glass. Broad wooden steps, ascending to an unrailed platform at the front, conducted one to the double doors. Over these was a shuttered belfry crowned by a weather-vane holding high an iron cross.

Matt, as well as the girl, was nervous and wished to lead their talk into new fields. "See that," said he, pointing to the sacred emblem, "they're just like Catholics."

"How do you mean like Catholics?"

There was a touch of amusement in the query that might have caused a more astute observer to weigh his words. Matt, unheeding, plunged recklessly into another topic of conversation.

"You just ought to see how they go on at Christmas time. They stick up cedar everywhere, and they have a cross in the pulpit. They read

their prayers out of a book, and their dominie wears a thing like a nightgown" —

Here Matt paused. A burning flush rose to his forehead. He should not have spoken about nightgowns to Phe Colton. "It shows my bringing up," he told himself angrily.

Phe laughed outright. There was a teasing light in her eyes. "But they behave like Catholics," said she, "because they are Catholics — Anglican, of course. I'm an Episcopalian myself."

"You!" Matt ejaculated weakly.

"Why, yes. What did you suppose? You saw I did n't come to your church."

"I thought," — his tone had a coaxing cadence, as if he hoped to persuade her to own that she was jesting, — "I always thought you were a Presbyterian."

"No," said Phe sweetly. "We're all Episcopalians."

Matt was silent. This last discovery but served to broaden the gulf between them that for the first time, to-night, he had seen was how wide and how deep. Phœbe enjoyed shocking him — a little, while she resented his silence. It implied that he was shocked too much.

"You behave," she declared, "as if I had confessed to being a cannibal. Why, Almiran Sweet goes to the Episcopal Church. He sings in the choir."

"Oh, yes. His father's vestryman." A jealous pang darted through Matt's sore heart. "That's all stuff and nonsense about the cannibals. Do you sing in the choir?"

"No," was Phœbe's demure reply. "But Allie does. He has the sweetest little voice! Sometimes Almiran comes over to our house, during the week, to try the hymns together with him."

Thus she sought vengeance for Matt's reception of her religious belief. He wondered as a second thought—his first being for himself—if Gitty knew. Of course she knew. It was because she was too deeply wounded for comment that she had never told her brother Phe Colton was an Episcopalian. The weekly "meeting" was a well recognized ground for the promotion of love-affairs. Gitty had always regarded it as a cross that Almiran and she should miss each other on Sunday. Of late her feeling had been fiercer than sorrow. She tried to smother it with silence, but the fire would not die down.

Again constraint seized upon Matt and Phœbe, and before either could make an effort to break through it, the pit-pat of a child's running feet came toward them down the road.

"Phe, is that you?" called her brother's voice.

"Yes, dear."

"Oh, I'm so glad. We've been looking for you. Mother was kind of frightened."

He drew close, throwing both his arms around her in a boisterous embrace. "Where have you been?" he asked. "Is that Matt Hager?"

"I've been at Gitty's to tea," said Phœbe. "I supposed mother would understand when I did n't come home. Is father there?"

Matt caught the strain of terror in the ques-

tion, and he felt like a brute indeed. He comprehended with what reason she feared for the doctor's safety.

"Yes, he's all right," the little boy assured her. "But Jemima's as mad as she can be. She says Henry Fisher is up to mischief."

"What's that?" Matt inquired, roughly breaking into the conversation. "How could Henry get into mischief?"

"We haven't found out yet," the child answered. "That's what's the matter. Jemima told father he did n't half do his chores, and then he went off, fast as he could, somewhere on the sly. Father said it was very queer. And I tell you Jemima's mad."

Phoebe kept her arm around her brother, turning him gently to walk with her in the road. For an instant she did not speak, an instant in which she was considering Matt's question of Allie, and his manner, and fitting them to the news of Henry's disappearance.

"I think," she said presently, "that we shan't need your escort any longer, Mathice. I have Allie, and he has me. We can take care of each other, the rest of the way home. Thank you for coming this far with me."

The gulf seemed in Matt's fancy to stretch out between them to measureless leagues and leagues. He stood here alone, and Phoebe was hopelessly far away.

"But I don't want to leave you," he stammered. "I would rather go on."

"I think not," the girl contradicted in slow deliberation. "I think you have an engagement, have you not? Possibly it is with Henry Fisher."

"Phe! Don't judge me like that. Will you listen" —

"No, Mathice. I would rather not listen to anything."

Because the words hurt her so cruelly in their utterance, she could make him suffer too. He turned on his heel, proud and angry, and she went her way with the child. There was nothing more said between them.

No sooner was she out of sight than Matt struck off "cross lots" for the schoolhouse. He was striding sullenly along, still slashing at the nodding weeds, when by the stone wall that bounded Sweets's sugar-bush he came upon Almiran.

"Helloa," called the latter in manifest confusion. "Is that you, Matt? I did n't see you in the dark. Where you going?"

"Where am I going?" Matt repeated with surly emphasis. "To the schoolhouse, of course. Are n't you?"

For he could see that his friend's face was set in the direction of the Colton place.

Almiran stood very still. One hand crept into a pocket and drew out his knife. He opened it, groping about till he discovered a bit of wood on the ground. As soon as he began to whittle he found his tongue.

"I ain't going to the schoolhouse," said he slowly.

Matt was careful in his speech, the more for shame at the slovenliness of his father's language and of late by reason of Phe's correctness. In his surprise, he fell back upon old usage.

"You ain't?" he repeated incredulously. "Why ain't you?"

"I don't believe I'll go to any more meetings," Almiran answered doggedly. "That's why."

"No, it ain't why, neither," Matt persisted. "What ever put such a notion into your head? Of course you'll go."

"No, I guess not," Almiran continued. "I guess I won't go any more."

"What on earth's the reason? Maybe you've turned Uprenter."

He laughed at the notion.

"Yes," Almiran assented. "I have."

Surely one of the blessings in a higher state of existence will be that of expression. In this life we are baffled, at every turn, by the inadequacy of speech. Matt glared at his companion, setting his jaws together, but not a word came from him. There were no words for this.

At last, "You're a traitor, then?" he hissed.

"That's what you call it," Almiran answered, cutting his fingers as well as his stick. "I call it, coming to my senses. It amounts to the same thing."

"And who brought you to your senses?" sneered Mathice. "Not your father. I'm sure of that."

The other whitened at the taunt, though he stood to his point.

"No," he conceded. "Pa is as good a Down-renter as ever he was. He ain't heard yet that I was wavering."

"I pity you when he does," with a short laugh. "Who turned you, then? Tell me that."

"None o' your business. I shan't tell."

A swift conviction seized upon Matt's mind and shook it. "You need n't say anything more. I've guessed. It was Dr. Colton."

Almiran made no answer.

A woman would have been too timid to push the question. For a man anything is preferred before suspense.

"Was it Dr. Colton?" Matt demanded hoarsely.

Almiran dropped his stick and closed his knife. The second's pause seemed interminable.

"Yes," said he, "him and his family."

There followed a silence so intense that each could hear the other breathe.

"Matt," clamored Almiran frantically, unable to endure that punishment, "what you goin' to do? You goin' to fight me?"

"Fight you?" with a deep-chested cry of scorn. "I would n't touch a sneak like you with the tips of my fingers. To sell your principles for — for a girl!"

Almiran had been led all his life by Matt. He had followed the other in his enrollment among the Indians, and he felt guilt as well as shame in deserting him, at least. He strove to hold Malthice's attention, standing in his path.

"I tell you I done it because it was right," he

urged passionately. "Matt, won't you believe me? I wish you'd listen. The doctor could convince you too."

"No, he could n't," Mathice retorted at a white heat of rage. "I am not to be bought nor bribed. Don't judge the whole world by yourself. There are some honest men left in it."

He placed both hands on the wall, vaulted it, and plunged down the bank on the other side. Almiran stood for a moment gazing after him wistfully. At length he too turned and, his head hanging like the craven he had been unjustly called, he went his way to the doctor's house.

To Mathice, hurrying on in apparent self-sufficiency, to keep his appointment and bear his promised part among the conspirators, that old imagery presented itself yet again to his consciousness. The gulf was impassable, and it divided him now from his oldest friend. Almiran stood by Phœbe on the farther shore.

CHAPTER VIII

A KETTLE OF TAR

A wisdom so tenderly and so precisely circumspect is a mortal enemy to haughty execution. — MONTAIGNE.

As Matt neared the schoolhouse, its lights and the hum of conversation told him that the Indians had assembled. Under the trees close by were tied some dozen horses in their ridiculous disguise. He stood on the step for a moment of hesitation, disgust at this folly, hatred of participation waxing in his heart. Like most of the frolickers, he had been drawn into their schemes from sheer animal spirits, a craving for excitement that found no legitimate outlet in the dull life of a farm. A majority of the Indians were mere boys, but there remained a few leaders, who believed they fought for their rights, and who fought savagely, encouraging their ranks in revolt.

Naturally Almiran's secession forced Matt to reflect. Although it made him despise any notion of withdrawal, although it intensified his natural obstinacy into the clinging to a position because it had been once held, he could but long, in his youthful loneliness, to side with Phe and her father, and he could but loathe himself as he recalled the girl's contempt when she guessed that he or his

comrades had coaxed Henry Fisher to join their band.

He heard Henry's high-pitched, agitated voice inside the schoolroom. He felt, with the memory of Phe Colton's indignant eyes before him, that he could not enter the building and engage at Henry's side in some new piece of nonsense. He hated the enterprise; he hated the Indians and his part among them. As he lingered on the doorstep, between the noisy room and the silent night, the fact that his old friend had deserted the Down-renters seemed the only reason why he should hold to them.

At that instant of indecision, something occurred to fix his wavering allegiance. Demosthenes Mix came riding down the road on his way home from Farley. He pulled up his horse sharply as he spied the lighted window of the schoolhouse, and the blanketed horses under the trees. Matt fell back into the shadow of the doorway, annoyed that he should have waited here till he encountered the patronizing platitudes of Mossy Mix.

But the young lawyer detected the noticeable figure on the threshold.

"Is that you, Mathice?" he asked softly.

"Yes," in a sullen growl.

"My boy," said Demosthenes (he was three years older than Matt), "I cannot tell you how deeply I regret to see you in such company."

"You have sharp eyes," was Matt's careless rejoinder. "I imagined I was alone."

"Don't bandy words with me. You understand

perfectly to what I refer. Mathice, this condition of things cannot continue. You and your mates are imperiling the cause, defying the law and running daily into danger. In an unguarded hour, some one may go farther than he realizes, and work irreparable disaster. I warn you for your own good. We, who are the men of sober judgment in this agitation, cannot sympathize with all that must hinder and not help the Anti-rent question. You harm us, you harm yourselves, and what the end may be we shudder to contemplate."

Through the pretentious periods Matt saw how the speaker's heart was torn between family traditions and the maintenance of his professional respectability. Demosthenes was pleading, in such terms as were alone possible to him, for his brother, whose share in the uprising he dared not name. Omar was only a boy, led, as these two understood, into the movement more by Matt Hager's influence than by the home teachings of his father. The truth in Demosthenes's exhortation sharpened its sting. It roused all Matt's stubbornness, and produced a vehemence which was more than honest.

"I guess you might better jog along home, Mossy," he replied, his fingers on the latch. "All you say can't move me, and I don't suppose you want to harangue the crowd. Do you?"

"I have no desire to harangue any one," was the rejoinder, "although I feel it my duty to inform them — or them through you — that Tobias Snyder is on the watch for you Indians to-night; thus much I learned in town."

"Then that settles it," declared Matt teasingly. "We must go, if for nothing else, to have a row with the deputy. But, Mossy, might n't it be unpleasant if the fellows were to catch you here? You've scolded us too often to be exactly popular, remember. And I hear them moving about inside. I think they're coming out."

He held the door. He honestly wished to prevent an encounter between the little lawyer and the roystering Indians. Demosthenes saw the situation no less quickly than completely. Giving his horse a cut with his whip, he called, "Git ap," — even Mossy Mix could not rise above the current encouragement to speed, — and disappeared into the woody road at a mad gallop. Matt raised an ejaculatory laugh, releasing his hold on the door.

Forthwith out tumbled a score of men, disguised and giggling through their masks. Henry Fisher, wearing his new suit with pride, was foremost among them.

"Oh, here you are!" several voices saluted Matt, not forgetting, however, their affected tones, nor calling him by name. "We were wondering what had become of you. Get into your things as fast as you can. There's fun ahead to-night."

Matt sauntered over to a hollow pine-tree, and stretched one arm down into its depths.

"What kind of fun?" he inquired, while he was fishing out his blouse.

Henry gave an important titter. Davit Finck, the leader, shook his head at some one who began to speak.

"That's all right," said he. "You'll find out in good time. What you got to do now is to git ready and come along o' us."

Matt felt uneasy. He did not like Henry's foolish mirth, nor this new reticence. "Big Thunder," said he aside to Davit, while he hurriedly dressed himself, "have you heard that Tobe Snyder was going to be out to-night?"

"Tobe Snyder is always out," was the brusque response. "You need n't try to frighten us off. We're bound to go."

"I had no notion of frightening you. But" —

"Shut up, I say. You're kind of apt to forget who's bossing these Injuns. I let you know I am. And we're bound to go, Tobe Snyder or no Tobe Snyder."

Davit Finck lifted his falsetto voice. "Come on, boys. Follow your leader. Are you ready?"

There was a general response. Those who owned horses brought them forth and mounted them, exchanging one for another in further concealment of their identity. Matt sought out Omar Mix for a companion among the footmen.

"What's up?" he asked, attempting an uninterested manner. "Did a horn blow?"

"Nope."

"Any house to be visited?"

"Nope."

"There is n't? Not anybody to be threatened?"

"No, I tell you. Keep still."

He perceived that, for some reason, the boy had been warned not to enlighten him concerning this

excursion. His vague fears grew real and great. He set his jaw doggedly. One powerful hand reached out and seized the other's arm. Matt gripped it fast.

"Where are we going?" he whispered.

"Oh, Matt, stop! You hurt."

"I mean to hurt. Where are we going?"

"Stop, I tell you. I'll call out."

"Not much you won't; or you'll pay for it afterwards. Where are we going?"

Omar stood still. So did Matt. The others swept on in advance.

"Where are we going?"

"Confound you! I never saw such a fellow. If you must know, we're on the lookout for Dr. Colton."

Matt ground an exclamation between his teeth.

"It seems," began Omar, with volubility, once the secret had been wrested from him, "Big Thunder's worked up over what Phœbe done — did you hear? — this afternoon, when we had Job Ecker in Sweetser Woods. And then the doctor, he got wind, some way or other, that You-know-who had joined. You-know-who thinks 't was that servant girl o' his'n told the doctor. Anyways, to-night he give him a regular talkin'-to; called him all kind o' names. It was as much as he could do to slip away from 'em there — Jemimy and Allie and the rest — so as he could git down to the schoolhouse in time. You never see such works."

"The hound!" muttered Mathice. "So he's set Big Thunder up to this."

"Well, you see," Omar replied, with a grin, "Big Thunder's been ready, any time since the doctor sassed him about his dinner horn. Put Sweetses Woods, this afternoon, on top o' that, and it did n't take much urgin'. Besides, you was n't at the schoolhouse" —

"No," said Matt grimly, "I was n't."

After a slight pause, he inquired, "Where is this precious caper going to be cut?"

Again Omar grinned slyly under his sheepskin mask. He was repaid for that iron clasp on his arm.

"You-know-who says the doctor's going to the Mayham place this evening. It seems the Squire's kind of under the weather. He'll have to cross Broomstick Hill, and that's where we're goin' to wait for him."

"Well, what then?"

"Did n't you see White Cloud was carryin' a kittle? Some of the other fellows have got the tar."

Omar laughed outright. He was by no means brutal, and he liked Dr. Colton. But to his sluggish soul, in a monotonous existence, there was a delicious freedom in these adventures of mystery and daring flattered by their clothing of fine names.

Matt paid no further attention to him. He was revolving in his mind every bearing of the situation, and asking himself what could be done. Matters had progressed too far for argument or entreaty; so his interview with Davit Finck convinced him. Resistance would be one man to twenty. In circumvention lay the only hope; and

what, on the spur of the moment, could he invent? He was not quick-witted, nor one of those rare persons who act most wisely upon a sudden stimulus. He was bewildered, and yet never for one second did he yield. With no notion of what should be done, "They sha'n't tar and feather Dr. Colton," he decided.

A dozen schemes presented themselves, to be one after another rejected. Time was pressing. Possibly, on the whole, the simplest plan was the best.

Omar and he had fallen several rods behind the last of those who walked. The thud of the horses' feet would hide some sound and the dark night conceal some movement. Matt untied his own sash, and whipping a handkerchief from beneath his blouse, passed it with a dexterous motion over his companion's face, binding it across the mouth. He then held the struggling and astonished boy with one arm while with the other he proceeded to bind the sash about Omar's legs, hobbling him. He lifted him over the stone wall at the roadside, dropping him into the field beyond. He followed, and crouching double, ran in the direction of Broomstick Hill.

Dr. Colton was driving through the restful quiet of the night, thinking of the patient to whom he was going, thinking of Henry Fisher and of Jemima's distress underneath her anger, thinking of many things besides the peril in which he stood. A figure loomed up at his horse's head and brought Sam to a standstill.

"Who is that?" asked the doctor sharply.

No one answered.

"Let go my horse. What do you mean? Let me pass, I say."

He pulled imperatively at the reins. But the threatening form kept a firm clasp on the headstall while creeping nearer to him. The doctor could see that it wore the dress of an Indian.

"Hush," Matt cautioned in an undertone. "Don't stop to talk. And get out of that wagon."

The doctor stared at him in impotent anger.

"Get out," Matt insisted in the same low voice. "I'm a friend. You can trust me. Get out, I tell you — quick."

For some reason his manner was more convincing than his curt assertion. The doctor rapidly came to the conclusion that, while this might be a trap, it was quite as probably a warning, and in either case nothing could be gained by resistance. He slid from the chaise.

Matt instantly seized him in his arms and pulled him, half carrying, half leading, back among the denser trees away from the road. He heard Sam start on again at his steady gait, and the nearing tread of other horses. He murmured a rapid sentence, pointing, as he spoke, to the east.

"Over there, straight as the crow flies, is your house. Run!"

He set the pace, striding off under the protection afforded by the grove. He saw that his companion followed, and, after that reassuring glance, did not look back again. The doctor saved his

scant breath for a dash over the rough ground. He ran at Matt's heels, nearer to terror than ever before since his boyhood, yet thrilled and exhilarated by the stir and the secrecy. At last, when the foot of the long, steep slope had been reached, when they came to a level field and could see the chimneys of his home, he began to take fresh courage. He paused at the bars of a pasture lot to regard his guide more curiously.

"I am to thank you, I suppose," he remarked in his dry, cool utterance, "but whom or for what I am uncertain. Tell me, did this have anything to do with the sheriff's men? I passed them talking to Demosthenes Mix just before you intercepted me. Are the Indians out?"

Matt's panting breath came a little swifter for the news of the ambushade. "So they've caught poor Mossy," said he with a chuckle, "instead of a band of law-breakers. Yes, doctor, the Indians are out, that's certain."

"Well — and then? I wish to be properly grateful. What have you done for me?"

"Saved you from a pack of fools," was the rough reply. "Good-night."

"Not so fast — one moment! And who is my deliverer?"

"Another fool. Good-night, I say."

He was gone in a moment more.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE SAMP-MILL

A character is a completely fashioned will. — J. S. MILL.

WHEN Matt Hager awakened on the following morning to a gradual realization of what had passed, it was to tell himself, in his blindness to the future, that this was the unhappiest day of his life, because it held no hope whatever.

His fellow conspirators would repudiate him for his action on Broomstick Hill. Phe Colton was lost to him, as were his two friends, Omar Mix and Almiran alike. Renters and Anti-renters would unite in scorn over one whose convictions were at war with his deeds.

He dressed himself, feeling tired and worn, as if the day lay behind him rather than before. But no sooner had he slipped down the bare stairs from his attic room and let himself out into the world beyond, than a peace came to him from the exquisite summer dawn. He squared his shoulders, trudging along the footpath to the barn, with the determination not to surrender thus cravenly. He was still master of his fate.

Then, as Matt went about his work, groping through the dusky stables and the silent yard, there descended upon him a nervous horror. It

was born of his morbid thoughts and his sense of isolation, and it grew on the eerie quiet of those strange moments at daybreak. It assumed a form most unfamiliar to the reckless young fellow, — the form of fear.

What if the Indians should fall upon him now, for their revenge, while he was quite alone and unprotected? They would seek vengeance — that was certain. When would it come? It might be immediately. It might wait for weeks. Part of his punishment might be deliberately planned as an undying apprehension, a dread for each moment of the day and night, and that for many days. His tanned cheeks turned a sickly white. He grasped the pitchfork more securely, glancing over one shoulder and then the other. Was that a stealthy step, or was it the trampling of a cow upon the scattered straw? He must be on his guard henceforth, always. He must never forget, and imagine he was safe.

Matt began to comprehend what he and his fellows had brought upon their victims by their threats, their bravado and boasting. "And I have more pluck than most men," he reflected. "I wonder that some of them did n't die of fright. I had no notion that it was — like this."

He was glad to return to the house, — not so much for the security of numbers as that he was soothed by the presence of human beings. Their early breakfast was as usual a silent meal, but the food, no less than the companionship, had its tonic effect upon Matt's spirit. He rose from the table

inclined to jeer at himself for a cry-baby in his former attitude towards life.

Old Jacob shuffled off to the bedside to hunt for his boots.

"Got to be corn ground," said he. "Git ready to go to the samp-mill quick's you can."

The injunction was apparently thrown at random, but Matt caught it, aware that it was addressed to him.

"All right," he answered.

He did not mean that it was all right, for the road to the samp-mill was long and lonely, and while he was leading Billy from his stall, the lurking worry presented itself once more, — here was opportunity for the Indians' revenge. A ride to the nearer mill — that which possessed a bolting-cloth and a "sopus stone" — was a lively diversion for a bright morning. One jogged along a much-frequented thoroughfare, to meet at its end neighbors bent on the like errand, who gossiped and cracked jokes, waiting for their turn. An expedition to the samp-mill was another thing. Matt looked off across the fields to the lane that he must take, and recalled its chances for misadventure. A spy might be hanging about now to watch his movements, to warn the others that the hour had come to strike. He experienced, not so much terror, as a sense of utter loneliness.

From the stable yard he could see Almiran Sweet at work in the cornfield. He could see Gitty, with a pretense of an errand, sidling down in that direction, carrying her pail for wild straw-

berries. He could see the two young people presently approach each other at a convenient angle of the rail fence dividing their fathers' lands. Here they settled themselves comfortably for a long-drawn talk, leaning their weight on the bars between them, the slat bonnet and the dilapidated straw hat bent close together.

"Well, anyway, Gitty's happy," thought her brother.

Almiran's turn had not yet come, Matt reflected, as he swung himself to the horse's back. He could fool away an hour with a girl, nor need to glance, first over one shoulder, then over the other, for the approach of vengeance. Evidently his desertion remained so far unsuspected by the Anti-renters.

As he rode down the grassy lane to the turn-pike Matt heard a warning voice: "Hey, there, stop. What you got in them bags?"

He turned sidewise, checking Billy's slow pace. Old Jacob was running after him. He stood still in the way till his father came panting to the horse's side.

"What you got in them bags?" he repeated.

Matt glanced down at the saddlebags, wondering what was amiss.

"Why, corn, of course," he said.

"Corn?" Old Jacob punched one bulging pouch, and went around Billy to examine the other. "Corn in both of 'em? Where are the stuns?"

Matt understood him now. As a child he had been sent to the mill with the corn tied in one bag

and stones filling the other to balance the weight. In after years he continued to make this arrangement for himself mechanically, nor was it until a comparatively recent day that the obvious better method presented itself. He remembered for the first time that as it chanced he had not mentioned his device to his father.

"Why," he argued, "what's the use of the stones? I have half the corn in one bag and half in the other, and Billy does n't carry any dead weight at all."

Old Jacob brought his fist down in a blow upon his thigh. "Put back them stuns," was his sole commentary upon Matt's speech. "Are you so much smarter than your father an' your father's father before you? If you are, you're a darned sight too smart. You get off that hoss an' pick up a bagful o' stuns, an' I'll stan' by an' see you do it."

He kept his word. Mathice, his fingers twitching, his scornful face crimson with anger, poured the corn into one bag, filled the other as directed, and without a glance toward his tyrant, seated on the fence, remounted, and galloped away. The chuckle which pursued him roused a wild hatred in his heart.

At least the episode had the effect of driving all other considerations from his mind. He was absorbed by the humiliation of his attitude — a slave to the caprice of a coarse-minded and ignorant man. Their relationship seemed nothing to Matt. He assured himself it was nothing; that the time

came when parents must be judged, not as father and mother, but as man and woman. He judged Jacob Hager as he rode on to the mill.

A buckboard, rumbling in the narrow way behind him, at length attracted his attention. He drew rein to speak to the driver.

"Do you want to pass?" he called.

By this time he had seen that Henry Fisher was perched in front. Both Phe and Allie Colton sat on the long plank, holding each other up, and laughing at the jolts of their unwieldy vehicle.

Matt's first thought was of the girl. What would be her greeting? It was a second, but no slight consideration, how Henry should behave.

He appeared conscious, and refused to meet Mathice's eyes. Nothing more was betrayed by his manner, while his response was, —

"Yes, lemme git by, will ye? This is a good place to turn."

Matt obediently drew his horse to the roadside, backing him down into the ditch. His gaze was fixed meanwhile on Phœbe's face, whence it never wavered. He was striving to read her expression. She had nodded to accompany Allie's voluble salutation. The little boy went on talking at length, giving no one else a chance, Matt told himself. But Phe looked kind.

The buckboard passed him, Phœbe almost touching Billy, she was so near. Matt bent his head and stared straight into the girl's eyes. They met his steadily. She murmured, and now she smiled, "How can I thank you for last night?"

"He did n't recognize me!" Matt answered in astonishment.

Phe raised her voice, glancing back as they moved on. "He could guess, and I knew!"

Matt straightened himself in his saddle, urging Billy to a canter. He whistled as he rode. The Indians might torture him. Henry Fisher might be their agent to inform him of certain doom. But Phœbe and he were friends.

As Matt approached the samp-mill, he saw before him Allie and Phe slip from their rough seat and run down the bank to the water's edge. Henry drove on under the shelter of the shed to tie his horse. It was there that Matt followed him. He wished to hear the worst. He believed that it could not be so bad — nothing could be so bad — as the uncertainty from which he suffered.

But egotism is the strongest of all forces, and Henry had his private affairs to consider, with no room in his shallow brain for Matt as well.

"Say," he addressed the last comer, peering around the horse's head, where he was tying a rope. "Say, don't you tell on me, will ye? Don't ye let on to Phœbe an' Allie where I was las' night."

Matt's lip curled as the significance of the hoarse whisper, the frightened face, forced its way through his own perplexities. "Maybe it's my duty to tell," he answered curtly. "I have n't made up my mind."

Henry's fingers trembled in their hold upon the headstall. "No, 't ain't your duty. What bus'ness

is it o' their'n? An' they'd be a turrible time if it come out."

"I should think it was their business," the other declared, "to find that they had a traitor under their roof."

He forgot, in his agitation, the patent retort. Apparently Henry, also, overlooked the fact that he might say, "You are another."

"I ain't a traitor," he pleaded. "I would n't go to hurt the doctor, no, nor none o' his fam'ly; not for ten dollars, I would n't do it."

"You were ready enough to help tar and feather him last night," the merciless prosecutor persisted. "I rather guess you would have found that tar and feathers hurt."

His voice shook, his cheek blanched at the thought those last words brought with them. The Indians' punishments meant, indeed, every suffering, — pain, indignity, perhaps death itself.

"Why, how you talk!" exclaimed Henry. "We wan't goin' to tech the doctor. We would n't 'a' done a thing but to scare him. Big Thunder tol' me so himself, before we started out. I should n't never have gone a step if he had n't tol' me so."

His babyish eyes, big with appeal, moved past Mathice, and settled upon some object farther away.

"Helloa," he cried. "Where on earth did you drop from?"

Matt looked over his shoulder. In the wide entrance stood Omar Mix.

He faced about quickly, throwing back his head,

leveling his eyes upon the boy, tightening his hold on the stick he carried. He thought his hour had come.

Omar took a step nearer him. Henry was quiet, grinning from one to the other.

"Well," declared Omar, surveying Mathice as if for the first time, "you 're the cutest fellow ever I seen in my life!"

Matt made no reply.

"I tell you I was glad when I see you ridin' up to the mill." The eager voice was changing. It began in a growl, and ended in an uncertain squeak. "I've been wishin' I'd meet you this mornin'. I want to thank ye, Matt."

"What for?" asked Mathice.

The switch in his fingers snapped beneath their pressure. His head whirled with the suddenness of the surprise. But he confronted Omar in no outward change of demeanor.

"For my part of it," the boy answered. "For puttin' me out o' harm's way. Gee! What if Mossy had ketched me 'mongst 'em! I bet ye he'd 'a' licked me good." Omar wagged his broad-brimmed hat over the notion. "But say, Matt," — he came on another step, dropping his tone to a confidential key, — "what we want to know is — Don't we, Henry?"

"Yes," Henry assented at random.

"What we want 'o know is why Big Thunder should 'a' been so set to go out. He says you told him Tobe Snyder was waitin' there the other side o' Broomstick Hill."

There was a second's pause.

"Why was he so set to go?" Henry echoed, like a parrot.

Matt began to see the situation. His loyalty was beyond dispute; his arrogance, as Davit Finck had hinted, was as fully understood. The Indians believed him to have acted for the common good in his rebellion against their chief. And — so it had happened — the action was proved to have been wise.

"Oh, I suppose," he answered generously, "he thought it was some story I had picked up, — that there was n't any truth in it. And he saw I wanted to save the doctor. He imagined I made a mountain out of a molehill to get the doctor off."

"We suspected as much. The boys was talkin' it over when we come back to the schoolhouse. An' your gittin' the doctor out o' the wagon!" Omar gave a hearty, youthful laugh. "I swan but that was cute. We're all proud o' ye, Matt. Ye done well. There was Tobe an' his men gallopin' up an' hopin' to ketch us in the act. An' there was poor Mossy that had run into him, on the pike, not darin' to move, an' wishin' he was further. I tell ye it was fun!" He heaved a sigh. "Tall events, so the boys say. I wan't there to see. I s'pose it's for the best I wan't. Mossy'd 'a' licked me good."

"Well, it *was* fun," Henry insisted, with his meaningless smile.

He had so little understood their purpose that the sheriff's chagrin at the fruitless meeting of the

band with the empty chaise appealed less to him than to his fellows. Still — "It was fun," he repeated.

"Have you seen any o' the boys yet?" Omar continued.

"No. Not yet."

"They say Tobe was too disgusted to arrest 'em for disguises. He might 'a' laid into 'em for that. An' he did n't do a livin' thing but cuss."

"No," Henry repeated, "not a livin' thing."

"Well, Matt, there's this much — I'm sure we're all agreed. You was the hero of las' night. I guess even Big Thunder acknowledges it now. Tobe had a heap o' men there. You was all that saved us. An' you saved me from everything."

"Oh, that's all right," said Matt in the accepted formula. "You make too much of what I did. It was only my duty, as I saw it. I'm glad the boys were pleased."

CHAPTER X

CRAZY DAN

"There is no resource where there is no understanding."

"HERE comes Matt Hager. Maybe he's heard about it."

The group of men, lounging on the platform, looked up from their pipes and their whittling, as Gitty and Matt drove up to Mix's. The girl clambered down from the wagon without assistance; it was not required, and no one thought of proffering it. After she had gathered together her armsful of barter and gone on into the shop, "to do a little trading," several of the bystanders advanced to the steps, and stood regarding Matt.

Vocabularies were small and conversation was limited, in such lives as theirs, shut out from reading or from travel or from free intercourse with their kind. They knew what they wanted to say, but it was painfully hard to express it. So they waited, each for another, and looked at Matt.

He was leaning back in his seat, the loose reins lying on his lap. He straightened himself quickly, eyeing the men.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Anything gone wrong?"

"Then you haven't heard about the row in Columbia County?"

"No. What is it?"

Matt's manner betrayed his relief. He dreaded something irretrievably wrong nearer home.

"You remember the time they had there, a while back, with the deputy sheriff over some writs he tried to serve?"

"Yes. Has anything more come of it?"

Two or three thereupon began to speak in concert. Conrate Swart's insistent voice dominated, although it was cautiously lowered.

"Why, you know some of the Indians lost their masks in the rumpus, and he recognized them?"

"Yes, I know. They were arrested. What then? Has the trial come off?"

Conrate nodded. "One pleaded guilty. He was fined \$250. Three have been sentenced to State's prison for two years. Two others have n't been tried yet."

Matt gave a long, low whistle. The tenants of each patent watched the others for example and encouragement in resistance to their landlords. The Columbia County affair was a test case wherein the Indians everywhere could see that the law against the appearance of disguised and armed men might prove more than a dead letter.

"And that ain't all," Storm Zielle added. "Dr. Boughton's been arrested for murder. 'Twan't murder. 'Twas an accident. But there was a man killed, and they throwed him into jail."

"Whew!" cried Matt. "They are going it! You mean Dr. Boughton the agitator?"

"Yes, the one," here Conrate's voice dropped to a still more mysterious cadence, "that thought of the notion, in the first place, of wearing disguises. You remember — he spoke here two years ago."

"I did n't hear him," Matt replied. "There's going to be another lecturer here by and by, is n't there?"

The several men all gave assent.

"I guess the meeting won't suffer none," Storm Zielle remarked, "because of all this interference. I guess we'll show 'em we can hold our own. Hey, Matt?"

"I guess so," said Mathice.

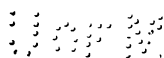
"For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

It was a commanding tone, rich and full and penetrating, in which the words rang out on the peaceful summer morning. The men started, drawing nearer together.

"It sounded kind of terrible, did n't it?" commented Casper Enpolt, "coming in like that on what we were saying. I'd clean forgot all about crazy Dan."

"He ain't been 'round in a good while," another observed. "Helloa, Dan, where you kept yourself this winter? How ye vas?"

The facetious address was lost upon its object. He advanced down the road toward them, kicking up the dust like a child, and gesticulating, while



his lips moved as if he might be praying. All watched the strange figure in the cloud he raised, no one speaking again at once. Crazy Dan was a tall, gaunt man, with a weak face and wandering eyes. He was dressed in shabby black, and carried a basket of carpenter's tools upon one arm.

"I always feel," Mathice exclaimed at length and half to himself, "as if Dan brought trouble with him. I never like to see him in town."

"Seems to me you're gittin' notional," said Storm with an uncertain grin. "What harm could crazy Dan do, I'd admire to know?"

None surely. The poor creature was a factor in the life of Farley too familiar to be deemed pathetic, although every one had heard his history. A half century ago no community was without its eccentric women who shut themselves into seclusion, and its men, "touched," according to local phrase, wandering about the country, gathering a precarious alms from the contemptuous pity of their fellows. Daniel Pick's slow brain had rebelled, long ago, under the pressure brought to bear upon it by combined religious zeal and pinching poverty, in a struggle to fit himself for the ministry. Through these later years he lived alone in a hut on Baldwin Heights, whence he journeyed about the county executing "odd jobs" of carpentry, his peculiar garb taking the form of quotation from the Scriptures.

"I'm no fool," Matt answered Storm Zielle sharply, "and I don't suppose he can hurt me. But someway or other I've always felt as if he

was unlucky. I used to think, when I was a little boy, that the fish did n't bite the day I met Crazy Dan."

He joined sheepishly in the general smile at his folly.

"For the great day of His wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"

"I guess it's because he's always holdin' forth out o' those creepy kind o' sayings," Casper rather elaborately explained. "It stands to reason, Matt, he can't bring trouble."

"Oh, no," Matt answered, "of course not."

By this time the sound of Dan's voice had attracted Josephine Mix from behind the counter. She came to the doorway and accosted him.

"I'm glad to see you, Mr. Pick," she called. "We want a new shelf put up in the store. Walk right in."

But Daniel had spied an audience assembled on the platform. He liked to shout, and he did not like to work.

"A word in season," he pleaded to the girl as he climbed the steps. "The harvest is ripe. I must thrust in the sickle, and reap."

"No, no," she urged. "Come put up the shelf first."

He waved her aside, set down his basket, and went forward to confront the group laughing at Josephine's discomfiture and Daniel Pick's characteristic behavior.

"Entreat the younger men as brethren," he began in a musical chant. "Hearken to the voice

of the Lord, for to Him ye shall hearken. The great day of His wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand? Brethren, do you know what them words mean? They mean," he shook a long forefinger at the row of careless faces, "the second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly."

In the warm sunlight Matt felt a chill shake his body. He told himself it was a touch of ague.

"And what does that mean, Dan?" a merry call challenged the exhorter.

Without turning in the direction of the sound, Matt knew at once who had spoken. Almiran Sweet must have joined the group closing in about the village butt. Matt whirled Billy around in the road, managing to turn his back on his old friend.

"Gitty, are n't you 'most ready?" he shouted.

Certainly Matt had no intention of betraying Almiran's perfidy to the Downrenters. Quite as certainly he intended to show the traitor that there could be no common ground henceforth between them. He was too unaccustomed to self-analysis to understand how large a part of this resentment was based upon jealousy. He gloried in his sentiments, not weighing their sincerity.

At his peremptory summons, Gitty hurried out from her gossip with Josephine. She blushed, in her flat bonnet, as she caught sight of Almiran, who looked as conscious at the unexpected meeting. But their shy smiles were their only salutation, partly because there were so many amused spectators, partly because Almiran was at that time uncertain how much he desired of Gitty's

society, and most of all because he comprehended what Mathice's action implied.

His face grew dull red with rage. Heedless of Crazy Dan's personal pleading — for the preacher advanced and, laying his hand on Almiran's sleeve, was disposed to beat time to a private explanation of his texts — he turned abruptly on his heel and entered Mix's door.

"Get in," Matt commanded gruffly.

He was mortified that his sister should appear so woe-begone, that her eyes should so wistfully follow the retreating form. "And all those fellows gaping at her!" he mentally concluded.

As they drove away both caught the comment tossed back and forth between voices inadequately lowered.

"What's up there? I thought him an' Almiran was thicker 'n cold molasses."

"After the same girl, I reckon." And then a derisive titter.

Of the two young people, equally unhappy, neither spoke during the drive home. Not until the house loomed in sight did either break the silence. Then Gitty uttered a sharp outcry.

"What's the matter now?" Matt demanded, roused from his fit of brooding.

He was disposed to echo the girl's petulant parenthesis, "I think we had enough!" when she went on, "There's Tobe Snyder's horse and buggy at the gate. Likely as not he's come about the rent. Oh, dear! How do you suppose father will act?"

"Like a blamed idiot," was Matt's reply. Set-

ting his teeth, he added at once, "And as soon as ever I get where Tobe Snyder is, I'll act like a blamed idiot too."

He tapped Billy with the whip, and they hastened along the road. Gitty swayed in her wagon chair, jolted about by the rattling pace, her features working with present discomfort and fretfulness as to the future.

Women make admirable martyrs on impulse, but their patience in protracted defiance is apt to wane.

"Oh, Matt," she gasped, when they stopped at the gate, "I've been thinking: could n't you give in — just a little? Remember what it means, if you don't."

Matt accepted this as the temptation of an evil spirit, more subtle since his heart spoke with it. "That's a pretty way to talk," he remonstrated, springing to the ground. "You forget there's a wrong here to be righted. And how will it ever be done if we all give in — a little? The only thing for us to do is, nobody yield an inch."

Gitty gave a sort of moan, no argument, but a mere annoyance. She did not attempt to speak further, and went on into the house, shedding a few tears on the bundles she hugged to her breast. Matt, meanwhile, led Billy out to the barn. He was on the alert, but saw no signs of the sheriff's man until the stable was reached. There he caught the sound of loud dispute, and guided by it, hastened around the building to the wagon-house.

On the grass outside, in the sunshine, squatted old Jacob. He had evidently been surprised at work upon a dilapidated hay-rigging. It was the constable Job Ecker who faced his fury.

"Come, come, Jacob," he was urging as Matt came within earshot. "They ain't no call for you to use such language. I ain't to blame. I was sent to serve the papers, an' I done as I was bid. I don't see why you should go to be mad at me."

The crouching figure upon the ground was endeavoring to rise. Old Jacob muttered incessantly as he lifted himself from his helpless attitude. The constable in his simplicity imagined the subsidence of that storm with which he had been greeted meant wiser second thoughts. He held out a folded paper in his broad, red hand.

"Now we're all right," said he. "You're goin' to behave decent, ain't you?"

Instantly it was a maniac who stamped and yelled before him. "Ton't you gome near. Ton't you gome near," shrieked old Jacob, reverting, as men will at such moments, to his mother speech. When very angry he was all Dutch. "If you gif me dat baper, I tear it into a t'ousand bieeces."

"But, Jacob," argued the man. "I *got* to give it to you. Do be reas'nable. I ain't no choice."

Old Jacob raised his right hand and heavily smote his thigh.

"If you to," he cried with a stream of oaths, "I gill you, so help me Gott."

He seized the hammer at his side, poising it for a blow. Matt sprang forward, but the officer,

alarmed out of what sense he owned, waited for no reinforcement.

He fled from the murderous weapon, and the murderous face behind it. He rushed past Mathice, nearly overturning him in his haste, and before old Jacob could carry his impulse into execution, the victim of his rage had disappeared. The two Downrenters were left alone.

CHAPTER XI

"THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE"

"Many enter the Temple through the gate called Beautiful."

THE church at Farley which the Hager family attended was situated on the main street, at the furthest extremity from the short lane leading to the little white building where the few Episcopalians worshipped. The road the Coltons naturally chose, and that directly from the Hager farm, so diverged that the two parties never would have met on Sunday morning had not Mathice taken affairs into his high-handed control. Gitty understood when it was that he learned of his love's creed. After that walk home with Phe Colton, each week as they drove to church, Matt found excuse, at the fork in the roads, for choosing the roundabout way which led down the hill by the cross-crowned church, and so, through the lane, to the main street. If nothing else served, he would mutter undecidedly, —

"I guess we might as well go around here," and cluck to the horses, turning their heads in the desired direction.

The girl herself partook of mixed emotions upon those Sunday mornings, as they passed what had

always been simply "his church" to her. If they failed to see Phœbe, her heart lightened, despite Matt's unconcealed disappointment. She concluded with a fierce joy, "Maybe she is n't coming to-day."

If they caught a glimpse of the graceful figure in its simple finery so exquisitely becoming, Gitty derived small good, thereafter, from the service in which she mechanically took part. Throughout the long prayer and the sermon her fancy was occupied by visions of Almiran seated in the singing gallery, his eyes wandering to the face and form that, a little while before, had caused Matt to color rapturously, that had roused her reluctant admiration, and had perhaps wrung from her mother's crushed interests the startled murmur, —

"My! How sweet she looks."

Sunday was no day of rest to Gitty Hager, church no abode of peace. In the selfishness of a first romance, when Mary Ann confided gleefully to her that not only her brother Demosthenes, but, it was rumored, "teacher" as well had become, of late, frequenters of the Episcopal church, she found comfort in the swift reflection that either of the rivals might push the less confident Almiran aside. She hinted this hope to Mary Ann, for she possessed the confidante most young girls find indispensable in their affairs of the heart.

Her practical friend immediately demurred, —

"But you would n't want him back, if he only came because he could n't get Phe Colton."

"Yes, I would," said Gitty.

The state of affairs had always been hardest on Sunday evening, when, although no youth ever dreamed of escorting a girl to church, "seeing her home" was a marked feature of courtship. Almiran and Gitty went, perforce, their lonely paths for years. Now the question to Gitty, joining, as of old, some other unattended young woman, ran ever, Was Almiran with Phoebe? and she dreaded Monday morning at school, lest some giggling girl might tell her how, on the night before, her constant fear came true.

Old Jacob transferred his religious duties to his family, so that he knew nothing of his son's new-found route to church. The son, for his part, had become accustomed, through lifelong submission to a conservative environment, to a meek following of custom, however unlikely he was, otherwise, to behave as a meek person. It dawned slowly upon him that another course lay open. He pondered long the gossip concerning Demosthenes' defection from the faith of his fathers, and Mr. Rockwell's frequent absence from among the Presbyterians, before it became apparent that, at least, he might do all they had done. One Sunday night, after walking to town with Gitty and the neighbors' daughters who often happened to opportunely cross Matt Hager's path, he astonished his sister by pausing at the foot of the lane called Church Street, and announcing coolly, —

"Guess I 'll go to the Episcopal church to-night."

The other girls raised an outcry peevishly shrill. Gitty understood her brother too well to waste

time in remonstrance. Nor on the whole did she regret this action.

"He'll get ahead of him, and take her home himself," one thought told another. And the second thought comprehended perfectly what that vagueness of pronoun meant.

Mathice left them, as he said he should, in spite of the protests raised. He strode boldly up the broad board walk, in the deep shadow of the maples, followed by reproachful eyes that detected a bravado in his gait, and could not see the embarrassment he felt. It was a terrifyingly strange experience — this that he undertook.

On the platform before the wide doorway stood Mrs. Colton, Allie, and Phe. The sickly light of a kerosene lamp over the entrance showed them to him and him to them, climbing the rough steps, coming to their service.

"Why, Matt Hager," cried Allie, "is that you? I thought you belonged to Dominie Lansing's church. Don't you? Almiran told me you did."

"Well, I do," said Matt grimly, looking at Phe. "But are you going to drive me away, if I want to visit you?"

She shook her pretty bonnet that had brought many an ache to Gitty's heart.

"No. You're welcome," she murmured as an accompaniment to her mother's cordial speech.

Mrs. Colton was frankly pleased to see the young fellow, to whom she was grateful for his interference on Broomstick Hill, in the behalf of her husband. Not only did she rejoice over any recruit

to their fold, but she was glad of the opportunity to pay especial attention to this particular stranger in the church. Of course he had no seat. Not in the least aware what it implied to her companions, she inquired, —

“Won’t you come into our pew, Mr. Hager? There will be plenty of room.”

“With you?” he gasped, unable to credit this stroke of good fortune.

“Yes, with us,” she answered, while Phe’s cheeks grew pinker and pinker. “Dr. Colton had a call this evening, and Allie sings in the choir. There is plenty of room.”

“Thank you,” said Matt fervently; “I’ll be happy to do so.”

And he was happy. As in a dream of bliss he followed the two along the short and narrow aisle, while Allie clattered up the vestibule’s approach to the gallery. Matt had never been inside the church before, but at first, between his bewilderment and his delight, he saw everything through a haze. He bowed his head, for a moment, over his hat, when Phe and her mother knelt lowly for what appeared to him long and lovely devotion. He told himself this was his lucky night. Mrs. Colton took the corner seat as a matter of course, forgetting again, in an older woman’s detachment from such follies, all that it might be to her daughter and their companion to sit side by side in the box-like pew, after Matt had latched the door and their rustling skirts settled themselves for the evening.

Phe was as conscious as the young man next her, although her confusion took a pretty form, and his showed itself in a determination of bearing, a set expression upon his face.

"Would you like me to find the places?" she whispered.

Matt had no idea what she meant, but he answered yes, because he could not bear to say no to her.

She opened a prayer-book and handed it to him. He accepted it awkwardly, and held it between a thumb and finger, seeming so distressed by its presence that Phe reached out for it again.

"You can look over with me," she explained in the confidential undertone that was so enchanting. "That will be best, after all."

Naturally, whatever looking over might be, it must be best — with her.

The bell ceased tolling. Late comers hurried along the aisles. There was a rustle in the gallery, and a faint conferring. The organ sounded forth in the voluntary.

Matt was too overcome by his position to move his head a hair's breadth. Yet by this time, gazing straight in front of him, he began to see something besides Phe Colton. Forty or fifty seats occupied the centre of the church, which had two side passages with rows of single pews along the wall. Transverse seats faced the pulpit at the end. There was no recess chancel. Instead a high, wide pulpit, on a level with the gallery which ran along three sides of the building, looked on a platform but a

step above the ground floor. The lectern and prayer-desk stood here, and the communion table against the pulpit's base. There was a railing around the three sides. "I don't see any gate," Matt mused. "How is the dominie going to get in?"

He failed to notice the narrow, paneled doors back of the pulpit and below to the right and left. Presently one of these opened. A white-robed figure glided through the passage. He paused to close the door, and Mathice absorbed every detail of the flowing surplice, the long sleeves, the black stole. Well, he never had seen a man dressed like that.

The Reverend Osman Wakefield advanced to the prayer-desk, kneeling while the soft notes of the organ rippled on. By the time he rose, "I kind of like it, too," Matt had concluded.

He possessed no understanding of what it was he liked, nor that the majesty of even so bare a church had found its way to his soul. The music ceased. Mr. Wakefield opened the book in his hand and, without glancing at the open page, as Matt observed, solemnly uttered these words:—

"The Lord is in His Holy Temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

"I swan I like it," thought Matt.

He marked Phe's every motion, and when, in compliance with the exhortation to confess her sins, the girl sank to her knees, Mathice threw himself heavily upon the bench with her. He heard, bound by a strange, sweet spell, the soft

recital reverently, to the listening Lord of heaven, of her repentance and her prayer for pardon. It was little to him that priest and people were praying also. He hearkened, awestruck, to Phoebe's voice alone.

As they rose to their feet, the girl held out one half her prayer-book to him. Matt clutched at it, his eyes seeking the page, his features desperately intent. He read, with the minutest care, the sentences before him. Phe answered the dominie, he remarked, but that they all did, and so readily! She never looked at the book. Presently there was a general flutter of leaves as Mr. Wakefield announced the psalter for the day. Still, Phoebe, so Matt saw, cast but a glance now and then at the leaf he turned. She repeated the sublime sentences as if they were her daily talk.

"O sing unto the Lord a new song: for He hath done marvellous things."

So said the clergyman.

"With His own right hand, and with His holy arm hath He gotten Himself the victory," the girl's clear voice responded.

"I believe she's got the whole thing by heart," thought Matt, with a wild pride in this accomplishment.

She seemed so saintly, so uplifted, as she stood, mute, throughout the chanting, or sat demurely, twirling a sprig of lemon verbena, her lovely face raised in an attitude of rapt attention.

"Here endeth the Second Lesson."

"God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and

show us the light of His countenance, and be merciful unto us."

Allie's fresh treble sang the phrases with a pathos in the innocence of the childish voice. Matt's keen eyes softened as the little boy, upheld by an uncertain country choir, proclaimed, —

"God shall bless us, and all the ends of the world shall fear Him."

Thereupon Phœbe took up the strain. Following the clergyman's guidance, surrounded by others saying the same words (Matt wondered what it was all about) the girl declared her Belief.

Other prayers followed, and the thirteenth from the Selections of Psalms: —

"My grateful soul shall bless the Lord,
Whose precepts give me light,
And private counsel still afford
In sorrow's dismal night."

While the dragging verses wound their slow length along, Mr. Wakefield disappeared. Matt supposed the service was finished. He made no move, however, afraid of an independent action. And by and by, the little door at the back of the pulpit opened. The clergyman, in a black gown, entered from the vestry room.

This was long before the era when extempore speaking should be deemed a fitting adjunct to a liturgy contending against the impromptu as unseemly. Mr. Wakefield preached a carefully written, earnest sermon, so short that Matt was taken by surprise with its close, but so dignified

that his Ascription appealed to the young critic as eminently fitting.

"I do like that," he thought.

When it was all over, when the congregation rose, and Matt could see Demosthenes' expression of astonishment and Mr. Rockwell's pretense of indifference, when, with a clatter, the pew doors flew open, and Phe murmured shyly, "We must wait for Allie," Matt was still in a beautiful dream. But she was the heart of it. He had composure sufficient to ask, —

"Can't he take your mother? May I wait on you home, Phœbe?"

And, oh, her face as she said yes!

Ah, well, whatever life doles out or withholds from us, we have all, some time, been young.

CHAPTER XII

THE CRIPPLE BUSH

Of all wild beasts, boys are the most unmanageable. — PLATO.

IN the conceit of a narrow mind bred in a narrow environment — and there is no conceit comparable with it — Jacob Hager believed his resistance would satisfy his landlord's agent, and the servants of the law, that they could not move him.

"I ain't never yet been made to do what I didn't want to," he blustered. Thus he fancied he had heard the last of the matter.

Squire Mayham paid no attention to this brag on the rare occasions when the two men met each other. But his sharp old eyes detected that Matt's spirit writhed beneath the noisy demonstrations.

"Among the friends of a cause," he told his sister-in-law, Miss Azubah, "there are always those who may be trusted to alienate others from it, where no contrary argument could prove effective."

The Squire spoke from personal experience.

"What's the matter with your team, Marcus?" Mrs. Hager inquired one morning.

Her apron rolled over her bare arms, she stood in the seldom-used front door, regarding the fine pair of horses with such interest as her listlessness could muster. Their manes and tails had been barbarously cut.

"Indians," was the curt response. "I differed from them, you see, in my opinion as to their treatment of the new doctor. And this is their method of fighting me."

Maria shook her head feebly. "It's terrible times," she remarked.

Her husband caught the weak sentence as he came around the corner of the house. "It's going to be worse yet," he prophesied. "They'll find out the tenants can't be budged an inch. Ain't that so, Squire?"

If old Jacob could be said to revere any earthly person besides himself, it must have been his wife's rich cousin. He had consented ungraciously to attend, and to allow Mathice to attend, with Squire Mayham a local meeting of the Anti-rent Association. All three were members, in common with most men hereabouts, but Jacob Hager did not believe in such gatherings. If he could have explained his repugnance, it amounted, after all, to this, that he found it hard to listen patiently to dogmatic assertions. Authoritative speech, on any matter whatever, he unconsciously claimed as his exclusive right.

The Squire, for his part, had a faint hope that the counsels of this conservative body might prevail with the violent old man. Something must

be done, and speedily, in Jacob Hager's affairs. The wise elder man understood that the attitude of defiance could not be maintained. Private advice was wasted on such a character. Possibly public admonition might be accepted.

They drove to a neighboring village, reaching Middlefield about noon. The Squire put up his horses in the tavern stables, and left Matt to feed them with the hay and grain Old Jacob had insisted upon bringing, while the other two carried their dinner-box into the barroom. This likewise was in accordance with the wish of the despotic guest. The Squire desired to dine at the public table. Jacob would not hear of such extravagance, and had commanded Gitty to pack up a lunch for them before they left the farm. Accordingly they seated themselves at one of the tables provided for such refreshment, and ate their cold meal together, washing it down with a glass of flip apiece.

"Richest man in the county, Squire Mayham is," remarked the landlord as soon as the door closed behind them. "Yet you don't ketch him paying for a hot dinner. He brought his own fodder, too, and saved a shilling. Well, it takes all kinds to make a world."

This somewhat barren philosophy was reinforced by the fact that very few farmers, rich or poor, used the tavern otherwise than as these had done. It must depend upon stage-coach travel for the collection of its modest revenues. Six cents a wayfarer was asked for lodging at such an inn.

The town was crowded to-day, for from every point within reach, men were pouring into Middlefield to attend the meeting. Neither were these all blustering young fellows, ready for a frolic. It was much to say for the Downrenters that many of them were industrious and moral, belonging to the sober and conservative class. An unusually good audience — in every sense good — filled the town hall at the appointed hour.

Jacob Hager was ill at ease and, consequently, sulky. However, he rather enjoyed the earlier speeches, where stress was laid upon certain incontestable facts: that throughout what had been in colonial days the great manors, not the severest toil nor any improvement in cultivation nor the growth of population could benefit the tenant. He possessed title neither to the house he built nor the fields he sowed. He could be driven from his home at any hour on a mere technicality of law. Much of the land was poor or exhausted. Emigration to the cheap and fertile Western country had carried with it many of the younger, stronger men. Those left behind found it sometimes difficult to raise even the low rent exacted.

One orator dwelt briefly upon the history of the case: how, in 1775, when the English government gave way to that of the State of New York, the feudal character of land ownership was changed to that which a simple citizen could exercise. Rensselaerwyck's new lease was said to have been drawn by Alexander Hamilton, brother-in-law of the last patroon.

"It was what was called a perpetual lease," the speaker explained, "with the reservation of an annual rent in wheat. About half the leases contained a reservation, in case of sale by the tenant, of one quarter the price, to be paid the landlord. The other half provided that in case of sale an extra year's rent should be paid to him. On the portions of land first settled, the annual rent of a farm was usually ten bushels of wheat for each one hundred acres, with four fat hens and one day's work with a team of horses or oxen. About the country later settled, the rent was generally fourteen bushels of wheat for every hundred acres."

Old Jacob cared nothing, one way or the other, for these statements, already familiar, but he became restive under the references that followed to the generosity of their late landlord, Stephen Van Rensselaer, who had been so loath to press his claims and so prone to accept any excuse for their nonpayment that, at his death, six years before, back rents amounted to \$400,000, while his debts were for the same amount. The speaker further conceded that the heirs had been honorable and considerate. But he reverted to the terms of Mr. Van Rensselaer's will, which created a trust for the payment of his creditors, and provided that the proceeds from the collection of back rents should go in that direction. They were the requirements of this trust from which all the tenants' troubles hereabouts had come.

The Squire noticed how closely Matt listened,

and how Matt's father squirmed about on his seat.

"Be still, will you?" he commanded sternly.

"No, I won't," growled old Jacob, "not to such fool talk. What's the matter with 'em, anyway? They ain't once said we was right."

"Wait," urged the Squire. "There is time for that yet."

For the long speech began to touch upon the proceedings of the Anti-rent State Convention held in the previous January. It repeated the resolutions then passed, demanding, on the part of justice, three things: a repeal of the special privileges accorded to landlords; legal authority to set up as a defense against the payment of rent the imperfection of the landlords' titles; and the taxation of rents. There were a few words upon the fairness of these demands, and further comment upon the Association's frequent petitions concerning the laws of ejectment, the reservation of water privileges, mines, and minerals, and the injustice of quarter sales; their request for a law against ownership of more than one thousand acres of land, another compelling landlords to sell to tenants at a price fixed by commissioners, one modifying the conditions of leases so that rents be payable in money, and, lastly, that the State seize, by right of eminent domain, all leased land, pay a fair price, and dispose of it fairly to tenants. "These petitions," the closing sentences acknowledged, "have received no attention, nor have the resolutions adopted by our State Convention. On the con-

trary, last winter's legislature passed laws aimed at such disturbances as have arisen from the wrongs of the Anti-renters."

Evidently by a preconcerted arrangement another orator took these last stated facts as a text on which to preach against violence. It was, he contended, not only evil in itself, but detrimental to their interests. His audience was apparently in general accord with this sentiment, a few men of Jacob Hager's type being alone in their disapproval. Some one thereupon made a motion for a tax upon each member of a few cents an acre, grading it according to the land he held, to meet the expenses of lectures and assemblies. It was carried almost unanimously, but the proposition of an insubordinate spirit that another assessment be levied for the cost of equipment and maintenance of Indians was overwhelmingly defeated.

"That was a most sensible conclusion, a sensible conclusion." The Squire repeated his assertion as they elbowed their way to the door. His clear-cut, decisive tone downed even Jacob's shrill demur in an unending argument during all the time that they were "hitching up" at the tavern. It continued after the carryall took its place in the long line of vehicles homeward bound.

Matt bore no part in the discussion. His head ached, his brain was dizzy with the attempt to adjust and inspect the facts presented to him for the first time. He sat in the dark beside his father while they rolled along the well-known

road, and the Squire, from the driver's seat, marshaled his forces against old Jacob, still railing at the innocuous proceedings of the Association.

Wagons passed them from time to time, or horsemen clattered by. They could see nothing in the velvety blackness of the hot, damp night, but sound was carried far, and the contention of the two men was plainly audible.

"I wish to gracious they'd be quiet," thought Matt irritably.

He was barely conscious of the feeling before he was pitched forward on his seat. The carriage stood still.

"What's the matter?" squealed his father.

"What are you about?" came at the same instant in amazed indignation from the Squire.

Matt peered forward through the gloom. Two men on horseback had stopped them. Two others on foot were climbing into the front of the carryall.

"What do you want?" demanded the Squire.

"We want you."

Matt sprang to his feet, aiming a blow at the nearest assailant. He was immediately seized from behind and held. Other arms grasped his father in their hold. Squire Mayham was lifted from the carriage.

"Drive on," said Matt's captor in his ear.

The reins were slipped into his fingers. The men, carrying the Squire among them, seemed to fade out into the darkness. There was no trace of them.

"Git ap," called old Jacob quickly.

Matt transferred the lines to his father. "If you want to desert him, go on," said he. "I mean to see this thing out."

There was no time for further parley. He leaped to the ground, and the horses trotted briskly forward.

Despite his resolute manner he had no idea how to act. He could not track them by sound on that noisy thoroughfare, nor could he see aught to guide him. And while he hesitated, chance came to his aid.

"Where did they take him?" queried a voice at his elbow, low yet penetrating. "I can't see my hand before my face."

"That's all right," some one else responded. "You go straight ahead. White Cloud told me the Cripple Bush; just beyond the bridge, he said."

There ensued a murmur of agreement, then a clatter of hoofs, and away. Matt followed on foot, rejoicing over this information, yet asking himself, as he ran headlong after them, how this thing was to end. What could he do, or he and the Squire, against a mob of men? But he went on.

Meanwhile the stout-hearted old gentleman was not dismayed by the situation, nor by the threats his captors poured forth in their flight.

"You can do no more than kill me," he answered steadily, "and I would as lief die as live in a world where I could not call my soul my own. If a man cannot speak his mind in a free country, matters have indeed come to a strange pass."

"Well, they have," was the Indians' reply.

It appeared that he was to be beaten — this refined and delicate old man. His assailants were mad with rage, those rash speeches to Jacob Hager capping the disappointment of the meeting; and his coolness served to further incense them.

"But I shall not give in," he thought.

They tied him to a tree, and bared his back. Then they left him, while they cut the whips for their purpose. All was hushed and dark about them. All things waited in the stillness.

Suddenly the clatter of hoofs upon the bridge below rattled out through the air. Men were coming — a host of men.

"It's a rescue!" shouted an Indian.

"Run!" called another. "Run!"

The Squire heard that sound, also the patter of their feet over the pine needles as they disappeared. He was left alone.

Yet not for long. Holding his breath, he caught the inquiries, the astonished question from the newcomers, who had no answer for it. Detecting their errand by their outcry, he did not betray his whereabouts.

"This can't be the place," said one. "They certainly are n't here."

"Let's try the other side of the woods," suggested another. And so they rode away.

Not all of them went on. One man lingered behind. At least he would try what a call might do.

"Cousin Mark!" He raised his voice in the night. "Cousin Mark, are you here?"

"Matt Hager! Thank the Lord!"

He was half fainting, tied to his tree. Yet, as the young fellow darted forward in the direction of that quavering answer, the Squire hurriedly proclaimed, "I did n't give in to them, Matt. I would not, for all their threats, — not if they had lashed me into ribbons."

"Oh, I knew that," Matt replied, his fingers busy with the binding cord. "I knew they could n't frighten you nor make you yield an inch. We Dutchmen understand each other. I was sure of you."

CHAPTER XIII

THE ELOQUENCE OF DEMOSTHENES

"Wont to do's awa frae me."

As a matter of course, after that blissful night at church, Phe never entered St. Paul's on those summer evenings, without a furtive survey of the board walk to see if by any happy fortune "he" might be coming thither again, while Matt glanced wistfully up the lane as he passed, longing once more to enter the path that led to Arcady. But likewise as a matter of course, he could not soon repeat so decided a step, and the days went by without another meeting there, without many meetings elsewhere. These were busy times for the farmers. School had closed, so there was no more fear in Matt's heart of the rivalry of "teacher," who had left town for the two weeks' vacation.

Mr. Rockwell had been a self-assertive candidate for Phe's favor, by virtue of his position elbowing even Demosthenes aside. But now he was out of the field, the young lawyer compelled all things to work for him, practicing on Almiran similar tactics to those that had hitherto kept himself somewhat in the background. Sunday night after Sunday night he was ready, waiting foremost in the line

of youths edging the platform outside the church. Phœbe could not, without open insult, refuse his offer of escort, and Almiran asked some other girl as a second choice, or he stalked gloomily over the hill alone. Repeated ill luck worked finally the results Gitty had hopefully foreseen. His ardor, at first stimulated by obstacles, became by degrees impatient, then discouraged. The pendulum of affection, always uncertain in its swing, wavered back to its old position. There was Gitty, faithful, fond, a little insipid, a little dull, a little plain beside Phe Colton, but — true.

One rainy night, after Demosthenes had eagerly offered the shelter of his covered buggy, and Phe, with palpable reluctance, accepted its protection, Almiran, lantern in hand, stumbled around the corner of the church to the sheds, in a worse humor than was his wont. He was cross, beneath the combined effect of depressing weather, continued disappointment, and a headache. He felt forlorn and misused, and backed his horse and chaise out into the summer shower, muttering queer, innocent expletives to himself. Mrs. Colton had not braved the storm. Allie was with his father, and Almiran overheard the doctor remark, as the horses took a step or two side by side, —

“Why, little boy, neighbor Finck has n’t stopped for us after all. Dominie Lansing must have more than usual to say to-night.”

This gave Almiran an inspiration. Dominie Lansing was the pastor of some one else besides neighbor Finck. If church there were not out yet,

why should he not confer his society upon Gitty Hager?

So it came about that at a moment when, between home cares and an untoward love affair, her spirits were at their lowest ebb, the girl had her glimpse of happiness in the sight of Almiran waiting for her at the door.

He mumbled the customary formula, "May I have the pleasure of your company home?" And his features wore a generous smile at the dear surprise his presence must afford her.

She answered, "Why, certainly," before they lapsed into every-day language.

"I've got the chaise at the horse-block," said he. "Come on, and git in."

Gitty followed, sweeping past the fringe of humanity selecting its mates, her head high, her face brilliant, no longer neglected, no longer a claimant upon Mathice's care, or a mere unit among the left-over girls who banded together in sufficient numbers to face the homeward road. Almiran had crowned her with the glory of his choice.

Phe and Mathice found their one night in fairyland while the world about them was so sweet that it seemed created for a background to delight. Gitty's joy was no less than theirs had been, although the rain beat in upon her, and she was jolted, through the splashing mud of an ill-made road, in Orrin Sweet's old chaise. Nor did Almiran lack his share of happiness. He had been so unsettled, so buffeted of late, that the richly generous love awaiting him was as the thought of

home to a tired traveler. He could not shut from his fancy the memory of Phe Colton's face, nor the peculiar quality of her clear voice. But to make the best of substitutes is one of the lessons oftenest to be learned. On the whole, Almiran felt contented with that fate which led him along the pike, in the wet and dirt, with Gitty Hager.

He was far better satisfied, certainly, than Phe Colton driving beside Demosthenes toward home. She was never at her best with this pompous young fellow. She wondered guilelessly that one so blind to his merits could attract him, and did not guess the depths of Demosthenes' conceit. He knew his sister regarded him with awful pride. He saw that the girls of his longest acquaintance considered him an altogether superior being. Phe Colton, possessing, as he judged, a higher standpoint than most of their companions, must so much the more surely be better qualified to see him in his true light. This was sound reasoning. The difficulty lay in the difference between Phe's idea and that of Demosthenes concerning his real self.

He misconstrued as thoroughly Phœbe's silence in his company, her loss of that pretty gayety which he had often marked, from a distance, in her intercourse with the rest of the world. Tonight she was constrained to the verge of timidity. Her feminine insight warned her something — it did not tell her what — was in the air. She moved restlessly in the corner of the carriage.

Demosthenes' monologue — his usual form of conversation — came abruptly to a close.

"Don't be afraid of me," said he.

"Oh, I'm not," Phe replied. "I should n't think of being afraid of you."

His face fell. No one quite likes to be told that one is not awe-inspiring. But then Demosthenes did not suppose she spoke the truth, since he was incapable of supposing it.

"I intended to convey the notion," his rolling voice continued, "that the subject upon which I was about to enter was one which might, at the start, alarm you. Yet I would beg you to give it your most careful consideration. For some weeks I have been revolving the matter in my mind. I believe I read in your manner indications to fill my heart with hope. You are, as yet, a child" —

"Please," Phe interrupted the flow of words, "can't we talk of something besides myself?"

Demosthenes bestowed a condescending smile upon the petulance which went to prove his last assertion. "Not altogether," he answered. "We must talk of you and of myself. For, Miss Colton, I beg the honor of your hand."

"What for?" asked Phoebe.

"What for?" The echo was peevish and provincial. Like the rest of the world, Demosthenes was in danger, at supreme moments, of reversion to the original type. In another instant he had resumed his throaty richness of utterance. "You evidently misapprehend my meaning," he continued. "I am making an offer of marriage. May I trust that you regard my suit with favor?"

So utter was his trust that without awaiting the

form of a reply he thrust out an arm, endeavoring to draw her towards him. With a cry of horror, Phoebe struggled from his clasp. Her parents had watched about their daughter, guarding, in an unsophisticated and freer age, her singular innocence. She had not, indeed, foreseen what was coming, nor understood it at first when it came. Now that she saw his meaning, there was roused no spirit of coquetry, no smallest wish to prolong the triumph. She felt only distress and alarm. She wanted to cry, and she wanted her mother.

"Oh, no! Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "I can't listen to you, not for a moment."

"Ah, you are taken by surprise," was Demosthenes' comment. "Shall I wait a little for you to become accustomed to the idea?"

"I should never become accustomed to it," she answered tearfully,—"never in this world. Please don't mention it again."

"Calm yourself, my dear Phoebe," urged the complacent accents. "You are, as I commenced by saying, but a child as yet. I can readily understand how this proposal, from one to whom you have looked up with a degree of fear, it may be, should evoke a deprecating terror. And I firmly believe that, as you familiarize yourself with the fact of my deep attachment, you will grow calm beneath it, and arrive at the point where you will softly whisper, 'Yes, Demosthenes,' to my ardent question."

Phoebe was aghast. The man actually construed her very dislike into appreciation of the honor he was conferring.

"No," she insisted, with what she supposed was intense earnestness, "I could not say such a thing ever. It is not possible, Mr. Mix."

That he did not understand her, even then, was due in part to Demosthenes' colossal vanity, but somewhat also to the gentle voice and manner which, no matter what her spirit, could not express vehemence. This self-satisfied lover hearkened indulgently, and as soon as she ceased speaking, began in that most irritating of all attitudes, — the false assumption of superior knowledge.

"I see exactly how it is. Don't be distressed, my child. I comprehend the situation. You cannot read your own heart" —

"Yes, I can," Phe declared, almost in a wail. "I can read my own heart."

Demosthenes swept this aside as irrelevant. "But I am content," said he gently, "for I understand. I shall wait for you, Phoebe. I shall be very patient."

"You must not wait; you need not be patient."

"There! There! We will drop the subject for the present. I had no idea, trust me, of agitating you like this. Some time, in the not distant future — Helloa, my friend, take care! I came very near running over you."

He pulled up his horse, addressing a man plodding along in the middle of the road, who had paid no attention to their approach. At Demosthenes' call, he raised his drooping head, standing a trifle aside that they might pass him.

"They grope in the dark, without light," said he,

"and He maketh them to stagger like a drunken man."

"Oh, it's you, Dan?"

"Hold your peace, let me alone, that I may speak, and let come on me what will."

"Not to-night," Demosthenes responded with a laugh. "Choose some other time and place to speak to us, if you please."

He drove by the muttering figure at the wayside in the rain.

"Who was that?" Phe asked, rather startled. "Is it the carpenter they call Crazy Dan?"

"You have heard of him, then? Yes, that was Daniel Pick. Why, how you are trembling!"

Demosthenes was a kindly fellow. He was distressed and perhaps somewhat conscience-stricken at her nervous state. "I should have set my offer before her by degrees," he reproved himself. "It was overwhelming."

The interruption served its purpose as an excuse for one of his interminable speeches, detailing the poor creature's biography, and lasting till Dr. Colton's gate was reached. Phe was familiar with the etiquette of the situation. She knew her rudeness in not inviting her escort to stable his horse and come into the house for an hour or two. She told herself desperately that she did not care. She shrank from his ostentatious assistance in alighting from the carriage, and with a hasty "Good-night" ran up the path. But Demosthenes drove away smiling.

Phe went around the building to the side porch,

the front door being for ceremonious use alone. Jemima Lane and Henry Fisher had drawn up their chairs just inside the kitchen door, out of the storm, but into the fresher air. They made way for the girl to pass them, and after she had gone on through the dining-room, Henry remarked, —

“Wan’t Phœbe kind o’ agitated? Seemed like it to me.”

“She was scairt out o’ her life,” was Jemima’s contemptuous rejoinder. “No need to put on spectacles to see that much.”

“What ud she be scairt about?”

“Like as not ’t was that young lawyer Mix. Did n’t you hear him callin’ out good-by at the gate? If he hain’t been makin’ love to that poor child, I miss my guess.”

Henry gasped under the shock of this information. “Oh, I don’t want Phœbe should marry Mossy Mix,” said he.

Jemima gave a sniff of disgust. “I ruther guess not. That conceited, egertistical — why, ’t would n’t be nothin’ short o’ bigamy for such a man to marry. But Phœbe ain’t goin’ to have him. You neenter worry.”

“Ain’t she?” asked Henry, much relieved. “How do ye know? Did she tell ye?”

Jemima shook her head.

“I don’t haf to be told. I guess I ain’t so blind yet but I can read the signs. No, ye shan’t say another word. And, land sakes! look at the clock! It’s time you stopped talkin’ about such foolishness, an’ took yourself off to bed.”

CHAPTER XIV

"OUT OF THE WAY"

It is not the orator's language that matters, nor the tone of his voice ; but what matters is that he should have the same predilections as the majority. — DEMOSTHENES.

As the men at Mix's had prophesied, there was a large audience to greet the Anti-rent lecturer in Farley. It surprised Matt to see Dr. Colton with Phoebe, across the little hall, on one of the front benches. But the doctor had some curiosity concerning these agitators, a feeling deepened by the recent arrest of Dr. Boughton. He wished, moreover, to hear what could be said for the cause which was distracting Eastern New York. He felt — for he was a just man — that he had not given the matter sufficient consideration to warrant his strong opinions. So he invited his daughter to accompany him to the lecture, thereby delighting the girl, for whom the world was divided, at the time, into places where Mathice Hager was and where he was not.

She knew he must be here to-night, and after his position in the room had been furtively divined, Phe tried to appear unconscious of his direct gaze and of Demosthenes Mix throwing smiles toward her seat from the conspicuous position he occupied

near the platform. The young lawyer had been drawn to the meeting by much the same feeling that influenced Phe. The sight of Dr. Colton and his daughter entering the building induced him to follow them.

"I am not prepared," he argued, "to indorse all that these men stir up in the name of Anti-rent. Yet I may, if I am present, see an opportunity to point out the evils of illegal violence, and thus effect more good than by my attitude in remaining away."

As all this simply meant that he was going, in any event, but preferred to go with a quiet conscience, it was not strange that Demosthenes' complacent expression confronted the speaker, or observed the restlessness, most flattering in his opinion, with which Phe Colton received his glances.

The lecturer was an ardent young fellow, half educated, quick, but shallow and no logician.

"He is afflicted with a rush of words to the brain," the doctor criticised under his breath. "If only his were innocent vehemence, I should be rather amused to watch whither it led him."

"But it is n't innocent," sighed Phe.

With a show of magnanimity, chances were given for questioning. Demosthenes improved these, to exploit himself before his townspeople in general, and his lady-love in particular. His honest desire was, no less, to enlighten many Downrenters who acted blindly in regard to the legal aspects of the case. Thus, when it was asserted that acts passed in 1779 and in 1789 abolished feudal tenures

between private citizens, Demosthenes brought out the fact that landlords had, nevertheless, for years, continued, uncontested, to embody like services and conditions in leases in fee. To the declaration that, by the terms of a perpetual lease, the landlord sold the land, the lawyer inquired if this were an assumption to be reached outside the courts. Upon quotations from Governor Seward's message of 1840, denouncing the prevalence of leasehold tenures as inconsistent with the best interests of the State and contrary to a sound public policy, Demosthenes required information as to what followed the message and the legislature's quickened action. The lecturer blundered over some of the particulars, but was set right by his inquisitor. It was shown that a commission appointed to look into Rensselaerwyck troubles recommended a conference between landlord and tenants; that at this time, the Van Rensselaer lawyer offered liberal terms of settlement, and only because the tenants demanded still further generosity did the proposed settlement come to nothing.

Demosthenes likewise brought out legal opinion: that of Judge Amasa J. Parker, in his charge to a grand jury at Catskill, in the previous September; and that of Judge Charles J. Ruggles at Kingston but a few months before, wherein he explained that the titles disputed by the Downrenters were of great public moment, and their validity should be rigidly maintained, since all the land titles of the country were derived in a like manner. To the proposition that the State take these lands and dispose of them

to the tenants, Judge Ruggles had quoted the Constitution of the United States, "No state legislature shall pass any law impairing the obligation of contracts," and had appended to it his own comment, which was repeated by Demosthenes, wagging his large head: "A law to abolish leases, or to change them into fee-simple estates, against the will of either party, would be absolutely void."

Phe was distressedly regarding the sullen impatience of the audience, who shuffled their feet during the interruptions, or applauded, with an appearance of relief, the flippant jokes from the platform which essayed to silence Demosthenes.

"I think," she whispered to her father, "they are very good-natured with Mr. Mix, don't you?"

"Yes," he assented, "and contemptuous of the little fellow. If it were n't for that they would have hustled him out of doors at the first word. For Demosthenes has the faculty of saying the right thing in the wrong way invariably."

Their conversation was under cover of another pause in the lecture. An artificial thirst for information seized upon Jury Post, who turned attention from lawyer Mix, raised a laugh for the Anti-renters, and seated himself, grinning at his appreciative comrades.

"Doc Colton!" at that moment called a voice from the door. "Doc Colton here? He's wanted."

The doctor stooped to grope underneath the bench for his hat. "Confound it!" he muttered. "Whose baby is teething now, I wonder? Well,

little girl, there is no help for it. You and I will have to go, I suppose."

Phœbe's face was so disconsolate as to amaze her father. Could she long to stay for more of this wordy duel between bucolic wits? She rose, perforce, to follow him in his difficult passage to the door, but her manner, despite an effort at restraint, was martyr-like, and more and more it puzzled the doctor.

Demosthenes detected their first movement, hastening to join them. He took the foolish step of attaching himself to Phœbe, while Matt Hager confidently drew the father aside.

"You are not going home, I trust?" said Demosthenes in Phe's ear.

"Yes," she replied coldly. "Father has a call."

"Must that of necessity take you with him?"

"I can be carried home on the way to the patient," Phe answered, still formally. To herself she added, "I wonder what he is saying to father."

Dr. Colton addressed her just then. "Mathice tells me it is Squire Mayham who is ill," he began, frowning anxiously. "I must make as much haste as possible. It is in the opposite direction from our house" —

"Yes, father."

"So, since Mathice is good enough to propose it, I think, child, I must leave you to his escort. He says he has a horse here, and will see that you get home."

The two young things exchanged bashful glances.

"Ah!" Dr. Colton ejaculated inaudibly. "So that is why." And he went away on his errand of mercy alone.

Demosthenes seemed instantly swallowed up in the crowd. If it were possible for him to be crestfallen, he was crestfallen then. But neither Matt saw him, nor Phœbe. The young man found a place for her on a bench near the door, while he stationed himself at her side. So they waited for the close of the lecture, which, in spite of their apparent attention, might, henceforth, have been in Sanskrit for aught that either understood.

At last it ended. The customary vote of thanks was taken, the noisy clapping ceased. Phe and Mathice, borne along on a wave of humanity, were swept outside the building. Some gay spirit raised a popular strain : —

"Out the way, old Tobe Snyder,
Or I'll tar your coat, and feather your hide, sir."

One voice after another joined in. It became a wild chorus.

"I hate to leave you in this mob," complained Matt tenderly. "Can you stand one side here, on Mix's platform, till I get the horse? I shall be right back."

"I'll wait," said Phe.

Such simple words may mean so much. The two were happy, because they were together. They did not greatly care what was expressed between them. Just this — that they might see each other — was enough.

Matt was as good as his word, and returned directly with Billy from the horse sheds behind the hall. In arms that trembled he lifted the girl into the buggy, and they drove away up the straggling street.

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“Out the way, old Tobe Snyder,
Or I’ll tar your coat, and feather your hide, sir.”

The hoarse shout was brought to them on the still summer night. Neither listened. The lawlessness of the song was set apart, far away from Matt Hager and Phe Colton. The silence about them was heavy with significance. They went on together, in a blissful unrest that, finally, wrought upon Phe’s nerves. She spoke, utilizing at random the first thought that came to her.

“It’s too bad about the Squire, is n’t it? I’m sorry he’s sick again.”

“Yes, I’m sorry too,” Matt echoed.

Selfish young creatures, their tones showed precisely how sorry they were.

“It’s pretty serious,” Phœbe pursued, merely to say something. “I heard father telling mother about it, one day. He’s such a portly, well preserved old man, he does n’t seem like an invalid.”

“Who does n’t? Your father?”

“Oh, Matt, how you tease! You know very well I mean the Squire.”

His silliness served as well as the richest humor to amuse a mood like theirs. Yet neither was heartless, only heart-touched, and Matt went on, “I’m afraid it is pretty serious about Cousin Mark. Mother’s worried — why, we’re worried, too, of

course, Gitty and I, but mother takes it hardest. He's the only kin she has left in the world, and he's always been good to her. My! how like fairyland the Mayham place used to seem when I was a little lad."

He sighed over his reminiscence, before noticing that he no longer held Phe's attention. "What's the matter?" he demanded.

"I don't know. It's just foolishness, I suppose, but" — Phe shuddered. "There are men riding up behind us," said she.

"Of course," Matt answered, "they are going home from the lecture."

"Do you think it's that? Are you sure? I thought — I thought it might be they were Indians."

Matt's brown hand, lying on his knee, tightened into a fist. "Why, Phe," he expostulated gently, "you are frightened, I declare. You need n't be frightened, even at Indians, while I am here to take care of you."

"Oh, yes, I know." To his consternation, she burst into tears. "Don't pay any attention," she sobbed. "Don't notice me. I hate myself to be such a baby. It's just — I'm worn out with suspense."

He saw that this was absolutely true.

The gallop of horses came nearer. It reminded Matt of the night of his return from the Anti-rent Association meeting. He, too, felt as if these were Indians.

Several men passed the buggy. Two riders

drew rein at the horse's head. They were Almiran Sweet and Omar Mix, as Matt perceived with a distinct sensation of relief.

Then Omar, in mere pleasantry, reached out a hand and grasped Billy by the headstall.

"Down with the rent!" he cried.

Matt shot a sidelong glance toward Phe. He made no answer to the challenge.

Omar pushed back his broad-brimmed hat.
"It's Matt Hager, is n't it?"

"Yes."

"Don't you hear? Down with the rent!"

Another second's pause.

"Down with the rent!"

Matt leaned forward. He jammed the whip into its socket, and handed Phe the reins.

"Up with the rent!" he said.

CHAPTER XV

FATHER AND SON

There is not, to my mind, a more woeful or wonderful matter of thought than the power of a fool. — JOHN RUSKIN.

"GREAT Scott, Matt," cried Omar, but in the same hushed undertone. "Somebuddy might hear you. This ain't no time for jokin'."

"I'm not joking," Matt replied.

Omar quitted the horse's head, riding up close to the carriage side. His face was thrust into Matt's. Their eyes met.

"Have you turned Uprenter?"

"Yes," said Matt.

His motion in giving Phoebe the reins had been on an impulse to spring to the ground and defend his new position by force. The lines hung supinely in the girl's fingers. Now she suddenly tightened her hold. Seizing the whip she struck Billy smartly on the back. The buggy whirled past Almiran, sitting straight and stern upon his horse, past Omar Mix, dumb with astonishment in the road.

Phe did not speak. Presently Matt forced himself to say, "That was quick-witted of you. Thank you for pulling me out of the scrape."

Phe handed him back the reins. "I did it

without thinking," she answered constrainedly. "It was by a sort of instinct."

Matt's brain seemed on fire, but his heart was heavy and cold. "What is the matter?" he demanded fiercely. "I should suppose you, at least, would be glad."

He found she, too, was aroused to anger.

"Not if you did it for that reason," she replied.

There come such times in life, when conventionalities are torn aside that the brutal truth may be spoken. "Did you imagine," Matt asked, turning toward her, sidewise, on the seat, "that I would throw over my beliefs, or say I did, because I wanted to stand well with you?"

"Oh, Matt, don't!" For his low voice was terrible to hear. "I did think it. Was n't it true, then?"

There was no trace of shamed vanity in her question. Phe Colton's was so fine a nature as to feel only relief at the knowledge that Matt was superior to this weakness.

He was too wholly absorbed by his stress of feeling to heed how she cowered beneath his anger. "Can't even you understand?" he cried. "There were a thousand things to keep me with the Down-renters: my bringing up and my friends, and — and my family. Then there is the pride about giving in. You don't know what that is to a man, and a man with Dutch blood in his veins. And Almiran Sweet sitting there! But the strongest reason of all was, at first, that I couldn't bring myself to do what I despised — somebody else —

for doing ; and, when I had fought that out, that this other would be your side. For it seemed like a bribe to me."

"I see," said Phoebe simply. "Then what was it that moved you, Matt?"

He sighed. "The continual dropping, I guess, that wears away any stone. I've been disgusted with the prime movers lately, and I never understood much about the movement. That Association meeting, a while ago, startled me ; I had no notion the case was so weak. I fancied this fellow, to-night, could set it all straight, and I went to the lecture, anxious to be convinced. But see what his arguments were ! Why, even Mossy Mix was too much for him."

"I think you are a real hero," said Phe eagerly, longing to atone for her injustice, "to take such a stand because it is right, and in the face of the consequences."

She assumed admiration for his course, yet she shivered at the reflection that here was another victim, besides her father, for the Indians' vengeance.

Matt for his part felt, what men and women must feel again and again as they go through this world together, the subtle difference between the sexes' point of view. He began a sentence, and allowed it to trail off into nothing. Of what use was it to speak ? How could he show her that where love kept him back from espousing her cause, the inevitable results had been what lashed him on ? The fear that he should be led by fear

had proved stronger than the dread lest he be persuaded.

So he appeared merely to shrug away her praise with masculine embarrassment. "Oh, I can get along with whatever happens," he remarked carelessly. "I'm big enough to take care of myself, I hope."

"Won't your father be very angry?" Phe timidly suggested.

"If you knew my father as well as I do," was the grim response, "you wouldn't consider it necessary to ask me that."

"But — Matt! Suppose he is — very angry indeed? What shall you do?"

It was the feminine instinct of protection, weak and yet comforting.

"Bless your dear heart," exclaimed the young fellow. "I shall get on all right."

They had reached Dr. Colton's gate. He flung the reins over the dashboard and leaped to the ground. His strong arms stretched up to help Phe. He lifted her, holding her thus for one precious second. Then he set her down tenderly, as if she were frail and might break.

"Be careful, won't you?" she murmured entreatingly. "Don't do anything rash — Oh, there comes Allie! Good-night."

"I'll be careful because you asked it, Phe. Good-night."

Matt found, on reaching home, that the family had all gone to bed, and, relieved that his contest with old Jacob should be that far postponed, he

stumbled about the dark kitchen (no door was ever locked in Farley), lighted himself a candle, and made his way as noiselessly as possible to his room. Nor did he guess this was the last night he should ever sleep in that little attic chamber. It was characteristic of his narrow, concentrated nature that whereas, two months before, he had undergone the tremor of doubt as to any possible step the Indians might take, now he was openly leaving them, other considerations altogether pressed in to possess his mind.

Here again the future was impenetrable. There was no foreseeing that, were the deserter not shielded from the visitation of wrath, in any case, he would have been forgotten. Yet so fast did oncoming events press one upon another that this was to solve the difficulty Phé Colton felt and Matt had quite forgotten.

For another phase of the situation presented itself as morning dawned and he went about his work. On his way to the barn he stopped at the best-room window to fasten a flapping blind. A scrap of white on the front door caught his attention. Dim as was the light, this showed forth distinct by reason of its singularity. He went close to it and, stooping, examined what it was. A paper had been nailed there while they slept. Matt read its purport, and re-read it. He was so deep in thought that he failed to catch the shuffle of old feet along the grassy footpath. His first intimation of another presence was the peevish inquiry, "What ye standin' there a-gawpin' at? Ain't ye never seen a house door before?"

"I never saw that on a house door before," said Matt.

"What is it?" Jacob pushed closer to the vestibule steps, craning his neck. "What does it say?"

"That there's to be a cattle sale two weeks from to-day to pay up your back rent."

"Stop talkin' sech fool stuff. Tell me what it says."

"That is what it says."

"A cattle sale?" Jacob repeated. "Whose cattle?"

"Why, yours."

"Mine?" His shrill voice pierced the air. "Well, that is a good joke!" He laughed a derisive cackle. "I'm jest the kind o' man to let 'em sell my cattle. Whose notion is it, anyhow?"

"Orson Money's going to do it. But, father, don't you understand? It's the law."

"Darn the law. I guess we Downrenters 'll see this thing out, law or no law. Well, well, I re'lly should like to see Orson Money sellin' my cattle."

"There's one way of stopping it," Matt hinted. "If you should pay the rent" —

His father's howl of rage drowned the sentence. "That's pretty talk from a son o' mine. If I don't look out I vum you 'll be gittin' some o' the new doctor's notions into that thick head o' yourn. I seen ye las' night. I seen ye. Ye took that girl home, did n't ye?"

Matt nodded.

"Ye remember what I told ye."

"You have told me so many things!"

"About her: I told ye she should n't never cross my doorsill" —

"Well, has she?" Matt savagely interrupted.

"That wan't all. I said ye was n't never to cross her doorsill, nuther. That's what I said."

"Who has?" the young man once more demanded. "I never have been inside that house in my life. And now we will leave her name alone, if you please."

It grew light as they stood on the vestibule steps, facing each other with angry eyes. Matt could see the sneering smile on the withered lips broaden into a laugh.

"Let's talk about the sale," he suggested. "What about the sale?"

"You leave that to me," old Jacob rejoined curtly. "I guess I can see to that. All I ask you is to mind what I tell ye when the time comes."

Feeling himself the veriest traitor, Matt threw back his head with outwardly his most arrogant air.

"I can't help you," he said.

"Ye can't? O' course ye can't help me, but jest to do as you're bid. I don't ask nothin' more o' ye than that."

"Father, I am sorry," Matt answered, "but even so much I can't do. I will not defy the sheriff."

Old Jacob raised one hand to his throat. The breath caught there and choked him.

"Ye — ye vool!" he yelled. "Pe ye scairt?"

"No," Matt steadily replied, "but I think the sheriff is right."

"Oh, ye to? Oh, ye to? An' vot toes I gare vot ye t'ink? It ain't Orson Money. It's t'e agend an' t'e lan'lort. T'at's vot it is, ye vool."

"I know all that," was Matt's rejoinder. "And I think the agent and the landlord are right."

"Pe you an Ubrenter?" shrieked his father.

He did not believe it even now. His children, their ways of life and thought, were often a puzzle to him. He supposed that Mathice could explain the apparent inconsistencies of his attitude after some fashion satisfactory to himself, although incomprehensible to his father's seldom tried brain.

While Matt hesitated to take the plunge, old Jacob repeated with a sneer, —

"Pe you an Ubrenter?"

"Yes," said Matt.

For a moment that burned itself into the remembrance of his son, Jacob Hager neither moved nor spoke. Then he raised his clinched right hand and brought it down upon his thigh.

"Py de Edernal," he swore, scarcely above a whisper, "you dake dat pack, or I'll gill you."

"Father," Matt protested, "I hate to say it. I understand what all this means to us both. But I am a man grown. I have my opinions, as you have yours. I am not a child any more. I am stronger than you, if it comes to that. And I can't be ordered to believe yes or no. I must judge for myself."

"Dake pack t'em vorts," was the sole reply.
"Dake pack t'em vorts."

"I can't. I *am* an Uprenter."

Old Jacob leveled his skinny forefinger, pointing to the gate. "T'en co," said he. "T'is ain't no blace for Ubrenters."

"Where shall I go?" asked Matt, not comprehending what he meant.

"Vot to I gare? Co to t'e tevil, an' starve, or peg. I ton't gare. Put co."

Matt turned toward the house, his proud head stiffly erect. "After I've said good-by to my mother and Gitty."

"No, sir, t'is momend. You nefer ender my house acain."

Matt had, so far, made every excuse for his father's depths of disappointment and surprise. Now this heartless dismissal drove all else from his mind. He wheeled about to the road. Doubling his right hand into a fist, he smote his thigh.

"I never shall enter that house," said he between his teeth, "until you beg me humbly to come back. You will see that I can be as stubborn as yourself."

His father saw it — then. He stood, blankly staring after the tall figure striding away into the distance. His mouth gaped stupidly, his eyes protruded. This was, in truth, a child of his, and he had given his son the nature with which to defy him.

CHAPTER XVI

SQUIRE MAYHAM

To wash the hands not only promotes health and clears the sight, but it also, incontestably, cleans them. — SAMUEL JOHNSON.

ON the whole Jacob Hager was well pleased with his action toward his son. He had expressed his anger. He had asserted his authority, putting down the only domestic revolt he had ever encountered. The indignation and the sense of wrong sustained him while he assumed Matt's duties, but by the time the chores were done, and he went into the house to breakfast, the burden of his years was heavy, and he, in consequence, in a more cross-grained humor than usual.

Meals were so informal in the Hager family that neither of the women considered it strange Matt failed to appear with his father. By the time they were ready to leave the table his absence was first remarked.

"I don't see where Matt is," Gitty complained. "If he supposes I'm going to save his breakfast any longer he's mistaken. He takes too much on himself."

"I should think he would be hungry," the motherly care was prompted to say. Mrs. Hager

crossed the room to the window, and searched the side dooryard that led down to the stables. Finally she turned her flat bonnet slowly toward the others. Both she and her husband donned their headgear when they rose in the morning, and only put it off to go to bed again.

"I can't see him," she fretted. "I can't see a sign of him anywhere."

Old Jacob was greasing his boots by the fire. He did not lift his head, nor appear to notice what was happening. But this indifference must be of short duration.

"Father," said his wife, "do you know where Matt is?"

"No," he replied in a snarl.

Gitty detected something wrong. She would have signaled to her mother, were not the older woman beyond considerations of diplomacy.

"You don't?" she queried, advancing upon Jacob. "Have n't you seen him this morning?"

Her husband dropped the boots with a crash. "Yes, I have," said he. "For all that, I don't know where he is now. Lemme alone."

"I can't see what you mean," Mrs. Hager urged, with the persistency of a weak mind. "Has he gone off anywhere?"

"Yes, I tell ye."

"When is he coming back?"

"Never," growled Jacob. "He ain't never comin' back."

Gitty broke into a wail. He cared nothing for that. It was when he saw his wife's thin cheeks

grow white that for one second his tough old heart was smitten. Then he called his grievances to mind, and was fierce again.

"Is Matt dead?"

He would not have recognized the voice as his wife's.

"He's worse 'n dead," he responded.

"How could he be worse than dead?"

"He could be, could n't he, if he turned Up-renter?"

He thrust his weazened face toward her, snapping out the retort. To him it was unanswerable. It was nothing to her.

"Oh, that!" she cried, almost with spirit. "Is that all? Where is he gone?"

"I told ye I don't know. What's more, I don't care. It may not be much to you to have a son turn traitor. I ain't built that way. He won't never come under my roof ag'in, an' so he understands."

For the first time in her married life Maria Hager showed a resolute opposition to her husband. Her limp little figure straightened and stiffened; her sunken eyes blazed. Her trembling tones were steady for that once.

"Have you driven my son from his home?" she asked.

"Did n't I say so?"

"Then say it again."

"I guess I won't 'less I want'er." And yet he found himself moving uneasily in his chair. "Who's master here, I'd like to know? It don't make what the women folks think."

"Did you drive my son from his home?"

A guilty conscience and some natural affection, both for his son and for his wife, gave Jacob a wholly novel sense of discomfort. He rebelled against it, he who was always sure of himself and his deeds, and it served to render his manner the more violent.

"You keep still," said he. "It don't make, I tell ye, whether this is accordin' to your notion or not. I ain't never yet give account o' what I done to livin' man, an' I ruther guess the time ain't come now."

Maria began to waver. "But, father" —

"Don't ye say another word. Don't ye never bring up that boy's name to me. I don't want to hear no more about him." *

Maria sank into a seat. Resting both elbows on her knees, the bonneted head fell forward on her hands. A choking sob broke the stillness settling down upon the room, where Gitty, awed by the catastrophe, was stealing noiselessly about her work. The mother's fire had flared up, and faded out. She was her old, meek self once more. There would be no further resistance. Jacob gathered his boots up into his hands, tiptoeing out to the porch to put them on. Maria sat by the window in lonely grief, and no one intruded upon it.

Gitty's own heart was very heavy. As soon as she could leave the house, and had seen her father on his way to the distant cornfield, she ran down the path to the barn, and so, through the bars, into the pasture, and to its bordering fence. As she

had hoped, Almiran was busy in the neighboring lot. He greeted her awkwardly.

"Have you heard about Matt?" she inquired.

"Heard about him? What?"

In her preoccupation she did not notice his tone. "Father and he have had a quarrel. We don't know where he's gone. I want you should find out for us."

Almiran crossed his arms over the hoe-handle. "What was the row about?"

"I can't tell you," said Gitty, regarding him piteously.

"Maybe I can tell you. Was it because he's turned Uprenter?"

"Hush! Don't speak so loud. Whatever made you think of that?"

"You need n't be afraid of me." He sank his voice, even in that solitude, before he added, "I'm consid'able of an Uprenter myself."

"You are?" His soul smarted beneath the horror that crept into her eyes. "Why, I heard you were one of the Indians," she faltered.

"I was — once. They don't suspect I've weakened, but I have. I seen the folly of it long ago. Matt's the only one's found out, and he called me everything he could lay his tongue to. He ain't spoke to me since, neither. You've seen it, hain't ye?"

"I saw there was something wrong, — I never guessed what. How did you know he'd turned?"

"I heard him say so," Almiran responded coolly.

"I must confess I was tickled, after the way he

laid me out. You'd 'a' thought I wan't fit to handle with a pair o' tongs. And here he's went an' done the selfsame thing himself."

He perceived that this aspect of the case, which appealed to him peculiarly, had no effect upon Gitty. Like all narrow natures, she went straight to the goal of her first resolve.

"What I want," she repeated, "is for you to find out where he is."

Even the bitter fact that Almiran, as well, had joined the Anti-renters was swallowed up in this.

"All right," he assented reluctantly. "If you're set on it, I s'pose I must. But I guess Matt Hager can get along, fur as that goes."

It was the encouragement Matt had given Phœbe. It was what he told himself, as he strode angrily away from his home at dawn, and had no faintest notion whither he was going. He might obtain a temporary shelter in any of several directions, since this was haying time, for which extra men were required. But there was small general demand for workers in that simple community, where most families relied upon "father and the boys" for all manual labor. Dr. Colton's was a peculiar case, in that his time was too broken to allow him to farm his land himself, and Henry Fisher was among the rare "hired help" of Farley. The Mayham place, of course, stood by itself. In this, as in every instance, the fine old house, in its actual aloofness from village life, typified its owner's attitude. The Squire and Miss Azubah ruled a little army of servants. Matt thought of their

home at once, because it had been an occasional haven in a troublous boyhood. But since he was aware that his services could neither be required, nor for kinship's sake refused, pride forbade him to seek a refuge there. He came to the crossroad where in the distance, on the slope of its terraced gardens, he could discern the chimney-stacks of the great stone house. He shook his head toward the pleasant picture they recalled, and resolutely turning his back, marched in the opposite direction.

By that swift, instinctive decision, Matt determined his future life. Large issues hung, uncertain, upon the course he should pursue. Not that he thought of them, nor of anything loftier than his present hunger or his future desperation. Then suddenly, at an angle in the rail fence by the roadside, he came upon the remains of an accident.

Two horses, thoroughbred, stood looking back, as if in gentlemanly surprise, at a light carriage lurching behind them on three wheels. The fourth lay flat in the dust, its splintered axle thrust aggressively into the air.

"Helloa!" cried Matt. "What's happened here?"

He gazed about him for the driver, and at first in vain. At last he spied a tall figure huddled close to the fence, prone on a strip of weedy grass.

Matt's first impression was that the man was dead. It was plain, from the trail left behind him, that he had dragged himself out of the roadway to

a sheltered spot, as it seemed by the final effort of a will stronger than the body. The young fellow had an unwonted sense of timidity in investigating the case, and advanced reluctantly, to stoop over the stricken form, and lift the face to the light.

As he did so the heavy eyes opened.

"Thank God," murmured a spent, tired voice.

"I have been praying for help."

It was Squire Mayham.

Matt knelt and raised the head and shoulders, that his cousin could rest against him. He loosened the collar and stock, and fanned the purple face with his hat.

"Let me see," said he presently, after a little reflection. "I guess, Cousin Mark, I can prop you up here against the fence" —

"Don't leave me."

The childish entreaty struck his heart; it was so unlike the Squire.

"I won't go far," he promised. "There's water in that lot yonder, and if I could make you comfortable here, with my coat for a pillow, I'd run down, and fill my hat to bathe your head. I think that would do you good. You wouldn't mind, would you?"

An inarticulate sound seemed to give him permission. He treated his cousin as a baby, and, disposing of him in the best manner possible, made the little trip to the creek with all the speed he could use. Meanwhile he watched the road impatiently for aid. No one was in sight, so, speaking from time to time to the wise horses, who appeared

to understand the dilemma, Matt rendered such assistance to the sick man as his ignorance and his appliances might afford. The Squire scarcely spoke, nor was he apparently quite conscious of his surroundings.

The turnpike was a frequented road on a summer morning. Presently a teamster, on a buckboard, came rattling into sight. He drew up his horses quickly as he spied the breakdown, and saluted it in the formula Matt had adopted, —

“Helloa! What’s happened here?”

Matt answered the call, from the fence where he bent over the Squire.

“Glad to see you,” said he. “Can’t you help us? My cousin is n’t feeling very well. I want to get him home.”

The man’s neighborly concern met Matt’s earnest look, — a look that expressed far more than the speech.

“Why, of course,” he agreed genially, swinging himself to the ground. “We’ll have him all right in a jiffy. Where does he feel bad?”

Again Matt glanced at him across the prostrate figure. “I guess he must have been thrown when the wagon keeled over,” he answered, “and that upset him a little. Was n’t that about it, Cousin Mark?”

“Yes,” murmured the old man.

“Why, I swan to goodness, it’s Squire Mayham,” exclaimed the farmer.

“At your service,” whispered the husky voice.

“Well, I declare for it, Squire, I’m sorry to see

you in such a fix," protested the man. "It's too bad. But we'll git ye home all right. S'pose we can use my buckboard?" The question was addressed to Matt.

"Better than wait here any longer," he replied anxiously. "We must do the best we can, and hurry. The main thing's to put him to bed as soon as possible, and fetch the doctor."

"I guess that's about it," agreed the other.

The homeward journey was accordingly made, awkwardly, to be sure, for the farmer led his own team at a slow walk, after he had secured the Squire's horses at the end of the buckboard, yet without causing much additional discomfort to the sufferer, stretched at full length with his head supported in Matt's arms. At the gateway which opened upon the curving graveled road leading up to the house, they encountered Joe Murray, who was full of expedients. In a more sophisticated region Joe might have been called the butler. To Farley he was simply "Squire Mayham's black man." He had all the deftness and kindness of a well-trained negro servant, and with his assistance the sick man was carried into the house and up the winding stairs to the great bedroom, where Miss Azubah was bustling about, making all things ready for his comfort.

"I told Marcus he was n't well enough to drive to town this morning," the little old lady reiterated, in her soft, good-natured voice, as she fluttered around the bed. "It was madness to try it, and I said so. But a man will have his way, and a sick

man is more obstinate than one that is well. There! This is what the doctor left for him last night, Mathice. Give him a teaspoonful from this glass."

Matt, sitting on the edge of the canopied bed, took the goblet Miss Azubah handed to him.

"Shall I go for Dr. Colton now?" he inquired.

"I'll go," offered the farmer, who lingered by the door. "I can call around there, on my way home. You stay here."

Matt felt a hand reach from under the counterpane and close upon his wrist.

"Don't leave me," whispered the Squire.

He looked toward Miss Azubah.

"Marcus wishes you to stay," she repeated. "It is best to humor him."

"That is right," said the Squire.

CHAPTER XVII

FAIR WARNING

My greatest adversaries are young ignorance and old custom.
— REGINALD SCOT.

GITTY ran down, the next morning, to that angle in the fence which was her trysting-place. There she found Almiran.

"Well?" she called breathlessly.

"It's all right. He's at the Mayham place."

She drew a deep sigh of relief. "Oh, I am so glad! If you could see mother's face! Is he going to stay there?"

"I guess so. They say the Squire's pretty bad off. Doc Colton was there all night."

Gitty's animated expression changed instantly. "Who told you so?"

"Well," Almiran answered slowly, whittling at the fence, "it was just like this. I thought it all over, and I see they'd be more likely'n anybody else to know where Matt was. So I went over to the Coltons' last night, and asked 'em."

"Yes," Gitty replied. "Phe Colton would know. She's crazy about Matt."

Almiran was not only good-natured, but he possessed, in a peaceable, phlegmatic soul, what sometimes serves as tact. He shrank from dissension,

and although the shot struck home, he made no sign.

"She did act sort of interested," he acknowledged. "But you see they had n't heard anything was wrong. It seemed natural enough to them Matt should go home with the Squire, and look after him — a relative like that. Did I tell you Matt found him in a fit, or something, 'longside the road?"

"Why, no."

"Well, he did. Doc says he'd 'a' died if Matt had n't come along. I guess everybody will hear that part, and not much else. I seen Omar Mix, too, and told him to keep still. Nobody need find out, after all, Gitty, that Matt's an Uprenter. Omar's fixed, and — and I spoke to Phe Colton. They were the only ones heard it but just me. Your father ain't likely to spread it, neither. I guess you ain't cause to fret."

This was true. The tender-hearted fellow had so managed, and circumstances so combined to help him, that Matt's absence from home was regarded as natural and temporary. There was no family scandal to explain.

Jacob Hager discovered this when he went down to Mix's on an errand rendered necessary by the loss of that son who, he now found, had taken many such duties upon himself. The surly old man had been for years allowed to creep into a selfish seclusion, rarely leaving his home, seldom seeing even a neighbor, and growing constantly more opinionated, dull, and determined in that retrograding loneliness. He was no favorite. His appearance

among his fellow-men received small attention. Yet, even so, he saw that his quarrel with his son was not suspected. Believing himself a martyr to the popular cause, he felt that, were the truth known, public sentiment must side with him. It would go far to atone for the silent grief of his wife at home if outside his Brutus-like behavior were approved. But the last straw was added to his weight of wrongs as Adem Mix remarked, over the sugar he was weighing, —

“I suppose Matt will come into every cent of that property now.”

“Huh?” grunted Jacob, surprised and sullen.

“Indeed he will,” the shopkeeper persisted, in what was intended for reassurance. “It was lucky for you the boy ran against him as he did. The doctor says he’d have died where he laid, if help had n’t come pretty soon. Then, having Matt right there in the house so, why, he’ll get every cent of the Mayham property. You see.”

Old Jacob clutched at his parcel. “T ain’t no ways sure,” he returned. This was his first intimation in regard to Matt’s whereabouts. “I’ve heard tell, for years, ’bout that prop’ty goin’ to his wife’s folks.”

“Oh, it won’t; not now,” Mr. Mix declared. “Blood’s thicker than water after all, and, with Matt there, tending the Squire hand and foot, as you may say, I miss my guess if he don’t come into the hull of it.”

Jacob scowled, moving toward the door. Adem supposed him unconvinced, and called after him :

"Wait a minute, Mr. Hager. I want to tell you something. I understand the Squire's affairs from A to Z. I and him were schoolmates at school, and he ain't never forgot it. We've always been first-rate friends." Here Mr. Mix leaned across the counter and lowered his voice, albeit they were alone. "I've heard him talk about his prope'ty."

Jacob as nearly turned toward him, as nearly met his gaze, as was possible to his awkward manner. "Then ye ought to know," he snarled, "what they've said for years: ev'ry stick an' stun on the place was left to them Western kin o' hisn."

"Yes, yes, Mr. Hager. That's what they've always calculated. But the Squire wan't ever real easy in his mind about leaving Maria's children next to nothing, for all this was the way he looked at it." Mr. Mix tapped the words out on the counter. "Jacob Hager's got enough — that's how he reasoned — enough, and lots of it. And Mis' Mayham's folks were needy. It seemed a kind of duty. He told me so more than once."

"Well?" Jacob snapped.

"Well, times have changed. It can't be more than a week or ten days ago he was in here, and he let fall that Miss Azubah and him were satisfied them Bretts were piling up money hand over fist. Why, they've sold town lots off o' that farm that nobody thought was wuth the taxes, till the Squire he says, near as he can make out, all they got to do in this livin' world's just to set still and let the dollars roll in. I bet they're snugger'n

what you be, this minute. Yes, sir, I could see then plain enough he was thinking about Matt. He ain't forgot, neither, that scrape at the Cripple Bush. With your boy right there in the house, don't you see yourself how he'll come into it all?"

"No," Jacob contended, "I ain't no idee he will."

He fled with this declaration, but it was not the truth. Determined that life must work out all his wishes, he failed, nevertheless, to force the entire belief that Matt could be no gainer by banishment from home. He assured himself that the Squire was too ill to consider such matters. Yet he knew they would be of the first importance to himself, were it his last hour on earth, and he possessed no other standard by which to judge the invalid. He rebelled madly against the notion that his disobedient son had profited by an unfilial act. His lack of imagination, his very denseness of understanding, were all that comforted him.

"I don't believe it," he repeated over and over. "I don't believe but what the Squire's too sick to do anything. Why, he may die any minute."

So he evaded the facts.

Neither Adem Mix nor the loungers outside the shop said a word to Jacob of the sale which was to take place in the following week. They were, to a man, sympathizers with his cause, and several among them were Indians. But personally he was disliked in Farley, and it was as Matt's father, or simply as a Downrenter, that they meant to guard his home.

It had been, moreover, deemed expedient to conceal closely a plan that, defiant as these rebels were become, was the most flagrant outrage against the law in which they had as yet engaged. So Jacob Hager left Mix's, and started upon his homeward road without having received, at this general meeting-place, any hint as to what should be done to sustain his resistance to the officers. He intended to stand firm, even if he stood alone, but he did not expect it to come to this. He was positive he could count upon the Indians.

Nor had he reckoned at random. His way led him past Storm Zielle's little whitewashed house, nestling close to the turnpike. A group of young men in the tiny dooryard were teasing Daniel Pick, at work upon the leaky roof, or conferred in an undertone, as was the habit in those days whenever a few friends met together. There was much to say in confidence.

"Here's old Jacob this very minute," said Storm. "Let's speak to him about it. Shall we?"

There was a murmured assent. Storm raised his voice.

"Hey, Mr. Hager! Step this way. We were just talking about you."

Jacob paused before the gate. He guessed what was coming, and perhaps one of the hardest tasks of his life was that he should accept it graciously. He had been always a self-reliant, unsocial being. It embittered him that he could not retain his independence here. He who had never shared his

long prosperity with others must beg them to be partakers in his ill-fortune.

"Well, boys," said he, "what you want?"

"Come here. Come closer," Storm replied, while the others crowded up about the gate. "The walls has ears," glancing towards Dan upon his ladder. "That's right, Mr. Hager. Step right up to the fence. Nobody ain't going to bite you."

Jacob's eyes flashed at the chuckle that greeted this pleasantry. To one altogether unaccustomed to restraint, his position was torture.

"Well, well, what ye makin' sech a myst'ry about?" he queried, endeavoring to smile.

"About this sale of yours," whispered Conrate Swart across the gate.

"What about my sale?"

"Is it going to come off?"

Old Jacob brought his fist down with a thump upon his thigh. "If I'm dead and buried before then, mebbe so. Not if I'm above ground, it won't."

"Good for you," declared an excited chorus. "That's the kind of talk. What you going to do?"

"Shoot," said Jacob.

"Good enough," cried the men once more.

"You want any Indians happening in? One man — or two, if Matt should be there — won't be much of a match for the sheriff."

Did not Jacob Hager realize all that?

"Yes," he forced himself to concede. "I guess a few Indians ud come in handy."

"Enough said," Conrate nodded. "Maybe White Cloud can be coaxed to get out some of them. We'll see."

He rolled his eyes in the direction of Storm Zielle. It was a boyish understanding that the rightful name of a leader or his subordinates should never be spoken in connection with the maskers.

"Maybe so," said Storm, whereat ensued another shout of laughter.

They had grown unconsciously bolder in their merriment. Every one was startled at the sound of a voice that floated down musically to the group:

"One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter. For all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Man of sin," — Crazy Dan directed a forefinger toward the up-raised face of Jacob Hager, — "who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Nay, but except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. A word spoken in due season, how good it is!"

He went back quietly to his task, and the shingles flew about him as he worked.

"Gosh," ejaculated Storm beneath his breath, "I never heard him pepper anybody with texts like that before."

"I guess he's kind of wrought up," Conrate Swart explained. "You see there are all sorts of things in the air. He picks up a little here and a little there, and it excites him. Then all he can do, to let it off, is to gabble Scripture. It sounded real comical, did n't it?"



"I think it did," Jacob agreed, in most unusual loquacity. "I did n't mind what he said, not a mite. Only I thought it sounded reel comical."

He turned away from the gate.

"August fifth?" observed Storm interrogatively.

"I guess that's about it."

"All right. August fifth it is."

And Crazy Dan, who called himself the prophet of the Lord, went on with his work, and paid no more heed to them.

CHAPTER XVIII

HAGER'S SALE

Revenge being indeed so deeply rooted in human nature that to prevent the excesses of it Almighty God allows not any degree of it to any man, but says, "Vengeance is Mine." — ISAAC WALTON.

IT was at this juncture that Gitty committed an act whose results were to be found unexpectedly far-reaching. Afterwards she strove to excuse her impulse by remembering how alone and how desperate she had been. She could not go to Matt, and brave her father's displeasure. Maria Hager, always compliant, had sunk beneath this last blow to an utterly spiritless creature. The short school vacation was over, but Gitty scarcely felt in a mood for study, and so far remained at home. Outside her family she saw no one except Almiran, and knew no one else (so she told herself now, and told herself vehemently many times thereafter) of whom to ask for aid. Moreover, underneath every other reason, was that sweetness of reliance upon him, of riveting the bond between them by dependence on her side and comfort upon his, — of trying his feeling for her by the test of what he would do.

So she slipped down through the bars to the

pasture, and at the fence raised the bird call that was grown to be their signal.

Presently Almiran appeared on the slope of the hill down which Phe Colton had raced on the day when she sought refuge at the Hager homestead. He walked over the ploughed ground, but seemed to be in haste and ran as soon as he came to a level strip.

"Helloa," said he. "I was lookin' for you. Heard about the meetin' last night?"

"No. Father never tells us anything. I was sure he went to one from the way he acted. Was there a lecturer here?"

"That same fellow Mossy Mix talked up to. He come back and held another meetin'. I guess it was just to set himself right with the boys here, for they did n't let it git out. They passed the word around among the Downrenters, and nobuddy else went. From what pa says, they must have had a high old time. I got out of it. I did n't go. Your father was there. Pa says there was some talk on the sly about what ud be done at the sale to-morrow. I thought you 'd be scairt, if you 'd heard."

Gitty leaned forlornly on the fence. "I had n't heard," she answered, "but I'm scared. Almiran, what shall we do? Father's sure to get into trouble."

Almiran glanced up sympathetically from his whittling at the rail. Every woman, it is said, has her one moment, if no more, of positive beauty. Gitty's came then. Her eyes were softened and

deepened by sorrow. Her lips wore a wistful expression. Her flat bonnet had fallen on her neck, revealing the tendrils of hair that, in the heat of the August morning, curled about her cheeks and temples.

"By gum, she looks good," Almiran mused. And he forgot Phe Colton's face.

"What do you want I should do, Gitty?" he asked gently.

She wrung her hands. "Oh, I don't know! What can be done? That's all I want — for you to tell me that."

"I wish I could," he answered dolefully. "Pa says your father went on like a madman, last night, at the meeting. He declared for it, when Orson Money come to take away his cattle, he'd have a gun handy, and if he touched 'em, he'd blow him up sky high."

"He would, too," said Gitty. "He'd do anything if he was mad. But what shall we do, Almiran? He must n't be let to act like that."

"You know the Injuns'll be there, don't ye?"

"I thought likely. Do you suppose they can prevent mischief?"

"I don't see how." Almiran frowned. He was afraid of what she should ask.

"Why, by frightening off the sheriff. They've done it often enough. Oh, Almiran," she gazed at him piteously, "won't you come along with 'em?"

"What for?"

He was whittling very fast. He did not care to meet the entreaty of her eyes.

"Oh, I don't know!" The old, familiar, feminine cry. "I'd feel so much safer and more satisfied if I was sure you was 'mongst 'em. Won't you come, Almiran? Please!"

Tiny splinters flew from the weather-stained wood. Almiran's torn hat bent low over his work of destruction. There fell a little pause.

"If I go," said he at length, without lifting his head, "it'll have to be in disguise. You understand that?"

"Why, certainly. I did n't suppose you'd side with us and show your face, so as you could be arrested. I meant just as an Indian."

"And—you remember I'm kind of an Up-renter?"

"I remember. But, Almiran, this once! Please."

Almiran groaned in spirit, saying to himself that it was after this fashion women regarded a principle. "You can ask 'most anything of 'em," he concluded, "and you'll be sure to git it; anything but justice. They ain't no idea what that means."

Gitty leaned on the fence, regarding him earnestly, magnetically. He twisted his body and limbs about, for a moment of indecision. Then he spoke.

"Well, well! Don't say any more about it. I'll come."

"Oh, you dear Almiran!" she cried jubilantly. "You're as good as gold. My heart's as light as a feather. I believe everything will go all right after this."

"I'm not so sure of that," he replied in a very different tone.

Before their early breakfast was finished, on the following morning, Gitty saw that men and boys were collecting in groups along their fence, and in the roadway. As the crowd grew, she spoke to her mother.

"Look at all the folks outside. It makes me ashamed. You'd think we had a circus."

"I don't care," was the dull answer. "I've got beyond all that. It don't make a mite of difference to me. Folks can do just as they please."

Maria did, indeed, go on, with perfect composure, about her daily tasks; but, no sooner had the older woman disappeared into the milk cellar, than Gitty tiptoed to the front of the house, and peered through the best room's shutters.

The deputy sheriff and Mr. Van Zandt, the landlord's lawyer, were driving up to the gate. They hailed her father from the step where he had seated himself.

"Hager," Mr. Van Zandt began, "can't we settle this business amicably? Both of us want to be fair, I'm sure. Come, now, man, be reasonable. Will you pay the rent?"

"Not a grain of wheat," was the instant response. "That's the way I'll settle."

"Very well," replied the lawyer. "If that is so, you must take the consequences."

He seemed worried, however, and Snyder's forehead wore an anxious frown. Old Jacob hugged his knees, rocking back and forth on the step.

Close beside him lay his rifle. He fully intended to use it, if matters were driven to an extremity, but this he did not consider probable.

"They 're scairt," he told himself. "They 'll run like rabbits when they see the Injuns."

Presently Constable Ecker and the sheriff, Orson Money, rode up and drew their horses by the side of Snyder's buggy. Gitty noticed the four men staring in the direction of the barn. Her father, crouched on the step, grinned as he gazed after them. She ran to a side window, and reversed the shutter slats. She saw eight or ten Indians leave the barn, march down the lane to the road, and, crossing it, proceed through the pasture where the cattle were grazing, to a grove of trees on the rising ground. More followed them, and more, until nearly two hundred men had collected in the wood.

After a little further hesitation Money and the constable rode along the line of onlookers by the fence. They spoke aside to several who, with marked reluctance, followed them to the bars. Ecker let them down. He and the sheriff rode into the meadow, and the men on foot followed. Mr. Van Zandt and Tobe Snyder came last of all.

Immediately the Indians appeared. In single file, each carrying a rifle, the masked men trod the soft grass, in slow procession toward the bars. The hot noon sun fell pitilessly upon their grotesque dress, making of the absurd show an ill-timed jest. Gitty, surveying them breathlessly from her hiding-place, could not believe any serious action

possible to these mummers. "I wonder which is Almiran?" was her most imperious thought.

As the men filed down the gentle incline to the fence, Mr. Van Zandt strode toward their leader.

"You understand the law" — he began.

"Damn the law," replied Big Thunder.

"You are aware that you break it by assuming these disguises?"

"I say, damn the law. We are here to break it."

Another Indian impatiently called, "Do you mean to bid on them cattle, Lawyer Van Zandt?"

"Yes," he answered promptly.

"If you do, you 'll be carried home feet foremost. I warn you."

Van Zandt threw out his hand in angry decision. "I shall say no more," he told the sheriff.

As the Indians came into sight, old Jacob had disappeared into the house. Gitty 'heard him stamping his way through the buttery, and the slamming of doors as he unlocked a closet there. By and by she spied him coming back around the corner of the vestibule. With one hand he tugged at a pail of whiskey in which a dipper bobbed up and down. In the crook of his left arm he held his rifle.

He crossed the road with his burden, and passed the pail along the line of Indians. Many drank eagerly. Perhaps some hearts needed strengthening, as they began to realize how far they were going, pushed on by their leaders, and by the fatal excitement of mere numbers.

Money now announced the opening of the sale.

He and the constable, followed by their supporters on foot, rode toward the cattle. The men all looked haggard and distressed. The Indians, at a whispered direction sent from one to another, began to move.

Ecker was singling out an ox. "Not that one," expostulated the lawyer. "You can't take a beast of the plough."

"Drive up the cows," ordered the sheriff. "Be quick, Job."

"All right," said Tobe Snyder. "Here we are."

He had swiftly collected a little drove of cattle. "Run to the bars," he called to one of the townspeople whom they had pressed into their service; "let 'em down so as I can git these critters out."

"Look behind you," said the man in a low voice.

Snyder glanced over his shoulder. "They mean fight," he muttered to the sheriff.

The Indians had formed three sides of a square, inclosing the cattle, the two men on horseback, and those beside them on foot. At the first step toward the bars, Big Thunder cried, —

"Drop that! Don't you touch them rails."

Ecker at once rode forward.

"Nor you, either, Job Ecker," added White Cloud. "Don't you dare to let down them bars."

Money advanced to his side. Tobe Snyder ran between the two mounted men.

"Shoot the horses!" Big Thunder shouted.

"Shoot him!" called another voice.

There was an instantaneous report. A volley had been fired. Ecker's horse uttered a frightful

scream and tumbled over, pitching his rider to the ground. Another round of shot followed. Money's horse fell in merciful, instant death. Ecker's was rolling in agony on the grass when it was killed by the second firing.

"Snyder's down," called some one.

Half stunned, Money stumbled up from the grass. Ecker was already on his feet. Van Zandt and the others came running together. Tobe Snyder lay on his face.

The Indians stood motionless. There was no attempt to refire, but Money, completely unnerved, appealed to them over the prostrate body.

"For God's sake, stop!" he cried. "Hain't ye done enough?"

No one answered. No one moved.

"He's breathing," announced the lawyer after an awful moment. "I can feel his heart beat. He is n't dead — yet."

A great sigh seemed to go up in a breath of general relief. Several Indians came forward. "Shall we help carry him to the wagon?"

They recoiled from the nearer sight of that white, fixed face.

"There's no carrying him far," Van Zandt answered curtly. "Take him into Hager's."

Old Jacob stood outside the bars, his empty pail in one hand, the rifle still hugged in his other arm. He stared stupidly at the ghastly procession, moving aside mechanically to allow them to pass. He plucked a follower by the sleeve. "Is he dead?" he inquired.

"Lawyer Van Zandt says — not yet."

"Where they goin'?"

"To your house. You'd better run on ahead and get things ready."

Jacob's spirits rose as he heard a groan from Tobe Snyder. "I guess I shan't go," he retorted, "not unless I'm a min'ter."

He hurried on, nevertheless, to the porch, and raised a cry for his wife. "Here's a sick man," said he. "You hurry an' put him to bed."

Gitty hastened out to join her mother. Old Jacob pushed past them both and shut the kitchen door behind him.

He sat there, hour after hour, hearing the coming and going of doctors, the arrival and departure of many feet. But he did not move. It was dark before his wife opened the door.

"That you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well?" A pause. "That man any better?"

"No," she said.

"He ain't? Is he wuss?"

"No," Maria repeated. "He is dead."

CHAPTER XIX

BREAKING THE LAW

"The wrong that amendeth wrong."

JACOB blinked through the dusk at the figure dimly outlined in the doorway.

"Ye don't understand who I mean," he said. "I mean Tobe Snyder."

"Yes, I know. He 's dead."

She added no word to this announcement. Jacob moistened his lips with his tongue.

"How long sence?"

"Not ten minutes ago. I came right here."

He drew one hand slowly back and forth across his knee. "I did n't s'pose he was goin' to die."

Maria affected not to hear this remark. She stood across the room, a wraith in the gathering gloom. "Father," she began, in a high-pitched, wailing tone, "you 've got to run away."

"What I got 'o run away for?"

She uttered an hysterical scream, then stifled it with her hands over her mouth. "Don't you see?" she hissed in a sibilant whisper. "You might be hung for this."

Old Jacob rose stiffly from his chair. "What ud I be hung for?"

"Oh, be quiet! You ask so many questions! For killing the sheriff."

"I did n't kill him."

"That don't make. I guess you're as deep in the mud as they are in the mire," his wife retorted wearily, custom preserving its familiar expression in this strange crisis. "You got to run away," she repeated inflexibly.

Old Jacob moved restlessly from side to side, peering about him at the surroundings of his lifetime, which it needed no light to see. "I don't want 'o run away," he urged.

"God help us!" cried Maria suddenly, with a singular new fierceness. "Can't you do what you don't want to, even to save your life? You got to run away."

The persistency of the phrase had at length penetrated the man's brain.

"All right," he answered almost gently. "You neenter scold so. I'm going." He crossed the room to the door. Maria did not move.

He lifted the latch. "Good-by," said he.

Even in his days of wooing uncouth and heavily facetious, Maria Hager had known him, at his best and his worst, as boy and man, for many years. And to her that farewell was as tender, as unexpected, as a kiss. Surprise silenced her for a second. Then she breathed an answering "Good-by."

The door creaked and closed. She flung her apron over her head to conceal her face, though she stood alone in the darkening kitchen.

Meanwhile Jacob pushed on into the night,

without a notion in which direction to go, nor of a refuge to seek. His days had been spent within the boundaries of that farm, clinging closer to its seclusion as the years went by. To him, well known as was Farley in one way, in another it was an unexplored region. His instinct was to get as far as possible from home. He followed the path to the barn, and went down the lane to the bars. So he traversed the pasture where Gitty was wont to meet Almiran. He lingered at the rail fence in a childish bewilderment.

"I vum," said he aloud, "I can't think o' anywheres to go."

The woods on the opposite hill attracted his wandering eyes. "I guess I could hide 'mongst them trees," he concluded.

There were nooks, certainly, in which he might be safe from sight. But after he had ensconced himself in the hollow where, two months before, Phe Colton defied the Indians, Jacob found his position as fugitive becoming harder moment by moment. Until this settling himself for the night he had been too flurried, too frightened, to fully appreciate the situation. Now when he endeavored to rest without bed or cover, when his old bones ached on the rough ground, when he could not sleep for lack of the crude comforts to which he was accustomed, he grew, first self-pitiful, afterwards restive, and finally indignant.

"By gum!" he ejaculated, sitting upright on the pine needles, "I ain't goin' to be treated this way no longer. I won't stand it."

He staggered to his feet, shaking himself like a dog coming out of the water. "I ain't goin' to stand it," he repeated.

But he did not dare go home.

Phe Colton was gathering huckleberries the next morning on the rocky ledge in her father's wood lot. Her face was distressed. Every one knew by this time of the deputy sheriff's death, that officers were scouring the country for those implicated in the murder. As she stripped the berries from the bush she was thinking of Matt Hager — as was generally the case — but now in the light of his trouble.

"I wish I could see Almiran," she reflected. "He would tell me all about it. And I don't like to question father."

A rustling noise in the shrubs near by wrung from her a little scream.

"Why, how nervous I am!" she derided herself, and laughed. "One would think I was afraid."

"Hist," whistled a low voice close to her ear.

Phe dropped her pail in the start she gave.

"Who's that?"

"Hist," the warning voice repeated; "it's me."

Jacob Hager thrust his head through a blueberry bush.

"Oh," cried Phœbe, "what are you doing there."

"Hidin'," said he.

"Have they — You don't" — She could not finish her sentence. "Were you obliged to leave home, Mr. Hager?"

"Yes," he assented gruffly. "Darn sech foolishness! 'T wan't me done it. But for all that, I dassent go back."

He set this before her in the form of a grievance. She ignored what he said, and went on to the practical present consideration. "Have you had anything to eat?"

"Not a mouffle. Nothin' but some berries an' a few apples. An' them was sour."

"Wait a minute," the girl proposed. "I'll run down to the house and get you something."

"Don't ye tell nobuddy where I be."

"No, no. Of course not. You can trust me, Mr. Hager. And I won't be gone long."

She hastened along the ridge, disappearing behind the trees. Old Jacob lay on his back under the bushes, chewing a wintergreen leaf and, as the summer sunshine soaked into his rheumatic muscles, entertaining a vague sense of comfort while he awaited his breakfast.

When Phe returned with her hands full of Jemima's delicious bread and butter, he fell upon it with gusto, and felt, after the last crumb was gone, the reviving courage of a satisfied appetite.

"Guess I'll jog along," he announced, rising awkwardly.

"Where are you going?"

"I do' know. Somewheres else. This ain't no hidin'-place."

"No," Phœbe agreed, "I don't think it is, myself. Let me see, Mr. Hager—you might slip down the back way to our barn."

"Cuss a barn!" Jacob shuffled his feet impatiently. "Folks are always runnin' in an' out a barn."

"Well, that is so. Then — there are the woods over here."

"Oh, damn the woods," cried Jacob in sudden fury. "You jus' try sleepin' in 'em once."

Phe eyed him with a gentle solicitude. A pitious figure in himself, as Matt Hager's father he appealed irresistibly to her heart. "You want to get under a roof somewhere," she suggested. "Is that the idea?"

"I tell ye, you jus' try sleepin' out o' doors."

"Yes, but then — I don't see — Oh, Mr. Hager, I know, I know!"

"Well, what?"

"There's our church, the Episcopal church. I have a key because I attend to the flowers, and we do up Mr. Wakefield's surplice. It would n't be a bit strange for me to go in at any time of day. I can hide you in the pulpit. It would be a lovely place."

Jacob surveyed her with what closely approached defiance. "How ye goin' to git me there?" he demanded.

Phe was disconcerted by this objection. "I forgot that part," she acknowledged. "We shall have to ask some help."

"Don't ye tell nobuddy."

"Why, Mr. Hager, I was thinking of Almiran Sweet. You would n't mind his knowing, would you?"

Jacob hesitated, solely because it was hard to accept a proposition which did not come from himself. Phe considered him merely cautious, and continued, "You see, I could n't go to the church at night. That would look odd. And, as you say, there is danger in taking you there by daylight. But I will lend Almiran my key so that he can smuggle you in, after dark. To-morrow I'll come, and bring you a basket of food. And we'll plan, Almiran and I, what next to do. Would n't that be the best way? Don't you agree to it?"

Jacob grumbled, "I guess so."

"You're not afraid of Almiran? He would n't tell."

"No," he replied in the same ungracious fashion. "I can't say as I'm afraid of Almiran."

Supposing Almiran to be enrolled among the Uprenters, Phe never thought of him as having occasion, in his own person, to fear the hand of the law. Jacob, who was ignorant of his defection, was still too bewildered, too self-engrossed, to remember that every man who had sometime figured as an Indian might be forced, in this emergency, to flight. As for himself, Almiran did not, so far, give heed to his own danger. After joining the maskers, he had been excited, swept along by the others. But his rifle was not fired, and perfectly disguised, taking no part in the dispute save that of an onlooker, it never occurred to him that he could be regarded as an accomplice.

Phe found a temporary resting-place for her ungrateful charge, and thereupon took the path over

the hill by which old Jacob had come to her. At the edge of the woods she turned northward, and climbed a fence defining Orrin Sweet's field of oats. She was pushing her way ruthlessly through the grain when a distant sight attracted her attention. Surely it was Almiran's battered hat, his suit of blue jean overalls farther along by the fence.

She raised her voice in a sweet, shrill halloo.

"Oh, Almiran! Oh, Almiran! Is that you?"

At the fence angle where he had given the bird cry that should signal to Gitty Hager, he wheeled about and saw the girl running along the field to meet him.

"Wait," he called hurriedly; "I'll come there."

"No. You wait." She drew nearer. "This is a good, safe place to talk. We can be sure there is nobody about to listen. Almiran," — she was close at hand, — "what do you suppose? I have somebody up there on the hill. I want you to help me hide him."

Almiran scowled. This innocent, pure-faced girl, who despised the Indians, who to him had always stood upon a pinnacle above these country people — himself and the others — should not descend to aid Anti-rent now that it was stained with blood.

"Is it one of them scamps that killed Tobe Snyder?" he asked. "You know it's against the law to conceal a criminal."

"Oh, I don't mind that," she answered. "Why, Almiran, it's Mr. Hager!"

The listener's face changed. "Oh, well! If that's the case—I suppose we must do something."

"Yes, and I'll tell you what." She began her story animatedly. He nodded approval from time to time.

"I see. I see. That would be all right. We'd have to git him out before Sunday, o' course."

"Of course. This only gives us a few days to look around. Oh, dear! I wish I could tell father."

"Don't you tell another soul," was Almiran's admonition.

"There comes Gitty, this moment," Phe whispered excitedly. "Could n't we just let her into the secret? They must be in such a state of mind."

Almiran did not hear the question. He followed the direction of Phe's eyes and watched Gitty's approach. She was coming, he knew, in answer to his summons. His heart sank as he saw her, on her way through the pasture, glance toward them, look again, and stop. She threw back her slat bonnet to stare at the angle of the fence. Then, with a haughty gesture that was like Matt, she turned her back upon them. She would not make three where Phe Colton was one of the two.

"Gitty!" Almiran called in desperation. "Gitty! Gitty Hager! Come here."

She walked straight on, as if she had not heard. He uttered a groan of impotence, and turned again to Phe.

"Well, give us the key," he said.

Early on the following morning, Phe left Henry at the board walk, under the maple trees, while he drove on to Mix's; and she carried the freshly laundered clerical vestments into the vestry-room. Over one arm hung the snowy linen; in the pocket tied around her waist beneath her gown was all the food she could take without detection from the pantry. She ran up the steps, and pulled from her reticule the key Almiran had returned to her the night before. With a little thrill of excitement, she heard it grate in the ponderous lock.

She entered the building with reverent feet, passing softly down the aisle, in the solemn stillness. Pausing before the rail she spoke.

"It is I, Phe Colton."

There was no response.

She waited for a time, staring at the pulpit. Momentarily she expected to see above it the old hat and the grizzled head. But there was no stir and no sound.

"Maybe he's asleep," Phe thought.

She opened the door to the vestry-room, and laid the surplice out upon the table. Then she climbed the narrow flight of stairs.

"I'll have to wake him," she said to herself.

She threw wide the door, and peeped around it. The pulpit was empty.

CHAPTER XX

OLD JACOB'S MATCH

"The elementary laws never apologize."

WE have all sometimes been punished, and have punished others, not because the offense was unpardonable, but because it came as the last drop in a brimming cup of bitterness. Gitty Hager went to the meeting with Almiran, dazed by this new distress, having no one else to whom to look for comfort, feeling it the sole faint ray of happiness in her despair. To find her rival engrossing Almiran's attention, beguiling him in this, Gitty's hour of anguish, with her beauty — that was too much to bear.

The girl's tortured soul refused to accept its new burden of jealousy. She retraced her steps with head erect and scornful air. It was only as she drew near home that she began to take another view of the occurrence, and to regret her action.

"It may not have been so bad, after all," she reflected, with something like insight into the facts. "Phe is real good. Perhaps they were only talking over what we could do. And I must see him. I guess I'd better run back, after all."

It was hard for the Hager nature to be placed

in a position where pity could be meted out, and aid must be implored. Yet there are times so tremendous that they dwarf every ordinary consideration. Gitty hurried down to the bars, ready to forgive. There she paused. It was too late. Phe and Almiran had disappeared.

She retraced her steps to the house, to witness her mother's restrained suffering, to plod drearily along the round of housework that must be done, and the tasks she attacked, not because they were necessary, but as serving to tire out the body and so in a measure to relieve the strain upon her mind.

She saw that the house was watched, and understood why Almiran could not openly visit them. She had, however, a faint hope that he might take advantage of the darkness to come to them. He must understand, so she said wildly to herself, how dire was their need of counsel. Unwitting what occupied Almiran's time that night, she waited, starting at every sound, throughout the evening, while he was conveying her father to the church, disposing of him there, and hurrying to Phe Colton with the key. When bedtime came to the two lonely women, Gitty's desperation found expression.

"Mother," she began, "I've been thinking — What if I go over to Cousin Mark's to-morrow morning, and have a talk with Matt?"

Mrs. Hager sat on the edge of the box-couch, her hands crossed upon her lap. Gitty suddenly realized that she had never before seen her mother's hands empty and idle.

"I don't believe it would do any good," she replied in a flat, monotonous voice.

"Oh, I don't know! I could tell him how things were. I could ask him what to do."

"There is n't anything to do," Maria declared. "We've just got to stand it. And why does n't Matt come to see us, instead of your running after him?"

"Why, you remember, mother! He said he would n't. You don't expect Matt Hager ever to break his word?"

Maria moved her head from one side to the other in a fretful gesture, as one might do if tormented by a cloud of gnats.

"I don't expect anything but trouble," she lamented, "and trouble right on till I die. I've always had it, and I suppose I always will."

"But, mother — don't you think it would be better to ask Matt what to do?"

"No, I don't. There is n't anything to do. And Matt's real hard to keep away from me, at such a time as this. I don't care, though, if you go."

Gitty understood this speech. Her mother desired such relief as lay in scolding, but she did not wish thereby to prohibit any assistance Matt might give them. So the next morning, the girl, after struggling with "the chores," saddled Billy, and rode to the Mayham place. She was aware that the man lounging in the road, near the house, must witness her departure. So she assumed a bold demeanor, and saluted him as she cantered by.

"I'm going over to Squire Mayham's. My brother is there, and I want to talk to him."

The officer nodded. "I do feel for the women-folks," he muttered.

Gitty left her horse with a boy at the stable, and walked, through the sunny paths of the old garden, up to her cousin's door. Miss Azubah had seen her from a window, and appeared between the Corinthian pillars of the high front porch. She stretched out her arms in welcome.

"You poor, dear child," she exclaimed, kissing the girl on each cheek. "My heart has gone out to you and Maria. How does she bear up?"

So complex is human nature that Gitty felt a vague but positive sensation of importance, of a theatric quality in the unusual happening, of a pose, miserable, to be sure, and yet of distinction.

"I don't see what we'll any of us do," she replied, fanning herself with her bonnet. "Mother's almost crazy. Is Matt in the house, Miss Azubah? I'd like to see him if I can."

"He is with Marcus. You know your cousin lies at the point of death."

This was said with a touch of reproach. The Squire's condition — as real a grief as Gitty's — had been Miss Azubah's chief interest of late. It seemed hard to see it swallowed up in the greater tragedy of Hager's sale.

"I declare," cried Gitty, conscience-smitten, "I'd clear forgotten Cousin Mark. He is n't any better, then?"

"He is weaker if anything to-day. And he won't let Mathice out of his sight. He wanders in his mind. He thinks that Matt is his brother Charles—the one that died when he was eleven years old. If Matt leaves the room, he begins to whimper, 'I want Charlie to come and play with me.' The doctor says we must humor him. It's bad for his heart if he's excited. I doubt whether Matt could get away."

Gitty stood, bewildered, before the fluttering little old lady in her rustling gown and prim lace lappets. It was startling, to her complete pre-occupation, to thus discover another household as absorbed in its own affairs.

"Why, it seems as if I must see him," she faltered. "I don't know, Miss Azubah," with a sob under her voice, — "I don't know how to get along, without somebody to talk to."

"You poor child! You are worn out. Come into the hall, where it's cool and quiet. And I'll have Joe bring us each a glass of wine. It will do us both good. And then I'll see. If Marcus should chance to be asleep, perhaps I could call Mathice. But you know it will be a long story. He has n't heard a word."

Gitty ceased the flapping of her bonnet. "Matt has n't heard?" she repeated. "Does n't he know about — about the deputy sheriff?"

"Not yet. You see he has been shut up in that sick-room, where he had no chance to hear."

The girl sank back in the high, stiff chair on which she had thrown herself. "Oh, well then,"

she exclaimed wearily, "maybe he could n't be spared — so long! I did n't understand. I supposed you'd all be talking about it over here, the same as everywhere in Farley."

"You forgot about Marcus Tullius," was the somewhat stern response. "We all have our separate cares in this world. Now sit still, child, and rest. I'll run upstairs, and listen at the door, while Joe is bringing the wine. I won't be gone a moment. Here's a cricket for your feet."

In her gentle, motherly fashion, she made her tired guest comfortable before disappearing up the broad, winding staircase to the passage above. Black Joe came, grinning and bowing, to set his silver tray upon the table at Gitty's elbow, and urge its contents upon her with simple kindness. Miss Azubah reappeared directly. She shook her head as she descended the flight of stairs.

"He's wide awake." She formed the words noiselessly with her lips.

Sweetly good as her nature was, it possessed a strain of determination that grows strong in such soil. Gitty saw at once it was useless to press her point.

So she carried home with her another disappointment. Night came again to the mother and daughter at the farm, finding them unadvised and unconsolated.

They sat together in the kitchen, waiting for bedtime, their chairs drawn up before the door of the back porch. Maria's fingers were twisting

her apron into rolls, Gitty's restless hands were occupied with a piece of knitting.

"Where do you suppose he is?" the older woman whispered.

Although both minds were full of Jacob's fate, it was of Almiran that Gitty thought at the moment, and she answered upon that impulse.

"I should n't wonder if he might come in, now that it's got dark. Nobody could see, you know."

"Do you suppose so?" Maria questioned eagerly. "I was afraid — It seemed too much to expect."

"I do expect him," said Gitty sturdily.

"Oh, well, then — There's a step this minute. Gitty Hager, I declare it's his!"

She sprang from her chair and stood clutching its back, listening intently.

"It is," said she. "It's father."

Gitty, as well, recognized the tread. "Yes," she agreed. "It's father."

The slow feet pattered along the floor of the porch. Old Jacob appeared in the doorway.

"Well?" said he.

"Is that you, father?" his wife greeted him.

It immediately became apparent that he had not returned improved in temper. Crowning the deprivations which rendered his wanderings beyond that scanty patience to bear, there was the mortifying consciousness of his folly in coming home. Yet his will and his habit had together been too strong for his common sense.

"I guess it's me," he snapped, "or all that's left o' me. What ye settin' right in the way for? Can't ye let a body in?"

He crossed the threshold, and Gitty closed the door. There did not seem much to say.

"I'm most starved," he announced. "Gimme somethin' to eat."

His daughter silently obeyed. She brought him a wooden bowl of suppawn, which he devoured greedily.

"Where have you been, father?" inquired his wife at length.

"The Lord knows," he answered angrily, sputtering over his food. "I been all over. Lived like a dog."

"Where'd you sleep nights?"

"I did n't sleep nowheres," he retorted. "Night before last I jest went round and round in Sweetsses woods. Could n't git a wink o' sleep. An' last night 't wan't much better. I was in a meetin'-house."

"You were?" cried his wife, with growing interest. "Do tell!"

"Yes, I was. In the Piscoble meetin'-house — in the pulpit. But I could n't rest none. It was kind o' turrible; like bein' in a coffin. I got out a window 'fore daybreak, an' back to the woods ag'in."

The women made no comment upon this narrative. He glanced uneasily from one to the other. "It's ridic'lous," he protested. "I did n't shoot Tobe Snyder. I ain't goin' to act as if I did, I

ain't goin' to be drove out o' my house like a dog."

Still they said nothing. Again there appeared no need of speech.

Old Jacob sat, frowning and pouting his lips. "Well, I guess I'll git to bed," he observed after a moment. "I'm beat out. I ain't scurcely closed my eyes sence — sence three nights ago."

Maria Hager gave a little cry. "Three nights ago!" she repeated. "Oh, if we could go back to three nights ago!"

"Shut up," said her husband.

At midnight Maria was aroused from feverish dreams. There was the movement and the subdued sound of a wordless struggle going on close at hand. She opened her eyes, and saw the glare of a lantern held before them. She started up on her elbow.

Orson Money was stationed at the bedside, holding the light. Two other men, young and strong, had seized upon old Jacob. His teeth set, his face distorted with rage, he was wrestling in their grasp, his failing force, weakened by all it had lately undergone, utterly powerless against them. To the submissive, much enduring wife, as she gazed from those set features to the trembling body and the captors who held it fast, one swift thought flew uppermost, over alarm and distress. It was: —

"Jacob Hager, you've met your match."

CHAPTER XXI

SON AND FATHER

The toil on parents spent must ne'er be called to mind.

SOPHOCLES.

MATT could not remain long in ignorance of the agitation which stirred the countryside. Indeed, Dr. Colton considered it his own duty to enlighten him, and welcomed, on this account also, a decided improvement in his patient. Although he shook his head gravely on finding it was the upper part of the body to which the power of movement had returned, there was an increase of strength, and the Squire's mind seemed clearer, so that the doctor felt he could appeal to him.

"Mathice looks pale," he observed, glancing from the sick man to his attendants. "You must give him leave of absence, Squire, so that he can snatch a breath of fresh air now and then."

The invalid at once displayed that artless selfishness of a frightened man unaccustomed to illness. "I like to have him here," he expostulated feebly. "There is no saying at what moment I may require him. I am in a very critical condition."

"Stuff and nonsense! You are getting better."

"No, I am not. I might die before night."

This was put forth more for reassurance than assertion, and so his physician understood it. "Why, so might any one of us," he answered cheerily. "I have noticed this fact, Squire, in every instance of a long illness with which I was acquainted. Though the disease may be incurable the patient outlives many a man apparently in robust health. It always happens. It will happen in your case."

The doctor paused, silenced by a realization that his words meant more than he sought to convey. Squire Mayham might live to see Jacob Hager die. "I want to take Matt back to Farley with me," said he. "You really must let him off for this one day. There are matters in town demanding his attention."

"Is it anything about me?"

"No, no. You are doing very well. You don't need anything more. This is for your cousin, Mrs. Hager."

"What is wrong with her?"

The question was rather perfunctory. Squire Mayham felt too weak to care much for its answer. Miss Azubah looked wise and alarmed. Matt stood, wide-eyed, regarding the doctor with amazement. "Is my mother sick?" he demanded.

"No, not that I know of. For all that, you ought to go to see her."

This satisfied the Squire. He moved weakly under his silk counterpane, turning his face to the wall. "Very well. Don't stay long, Matt," said he, and composed himself to sleep.

In a maze of bewilderment Matt followed the doctor to the hall and down the stairs to the garden. The absorbing interests of the sick-room had wiped all memory of the sale from his mind. His father was always in one difficulty or another relative to that wearisome story of Anti-rent dissensions. After years of bickering, Mathice did not suspect, even by the light of the doctor's hint, that matters had at last come to a crisis.

It was Crazy Dan who enlightened him. The carpenter was at work in the pleasant old flower garden, renewing the rotting props of a grape-arbor. He blinked over his shoulder, in the strong sunlight, at the crunching sound of footsteps on the gravel path. The sight of Matt doubtless recalled to him the events of the past few days. Stretching forth one arm in his favorite attitude of harangue, he declaimed, —

"I, even I only, remain a prophet of the Lord. When the word of the prophet shall come to pass, then shall the prophet be known, that the Lord hath truly sent him. One woe is past, and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter. For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children. Blood be upon your own head." He pointed toward Mathice. "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground."

Matt flung back his head defiantly, confronting the lunatic. He was aware that every rambling speech had a certain foundation in fact. "What does he mean?" he angrily asked the doctor.

"I suppose — I am not sure — this that has happened to your father."

"What is that?"

"He was arrested last night, Mathice. Have you forgotten the sale?"

Matt rubbed his forehead, staring at the questioner. "I had forgotten. Was there trouble?"

"Yes, my boy. The very worst."

"You don't mean" —

Crazy Dan strove to interrupt them here with a further torrent of scriptural quotation. Neither one heeded him. "I mean, Mathice, that the deputy sheriff was killed. They are making arrests right and left. Your father is among the prisoners, although he declares his innocence."

Matt's piercing eyes left the doctor's face. He looked about him impatiently, speaking half to himself. "I must go. I must saddle a horse directly."

"I'll drive you to town in the chaise."

"Where is he?"

"Why" — The doctor hesitated. "He was taken to jail, you know."

Matt made no observation upon this reluctantly given piece of news.

"Will you visit him, or your mother, first?" Dr. Colton asked.

"I must go to my father first."

For in that instant of revelation, when Matt understood how dire was the strait in which Jacob Hager was placed, he felt the tugging of the bond of blood between them. In his father's prosperous

days, he had known repugnance, anger, hate itself for the man whose name he bore. In old Jacob's degradation, Matt was after all his son.

So Dr. Colton drove to the county buildings, and left the young man at the door of the jail. "I sincerely trust this may not be as bad as it appears," he said, trying to utter some cheerful speech at parting. "If there is anything I can do at any time, of course you will call upon me."

"Yes," Matt answered abstractedly, "that's all right. I mean to say — I'm very much obliged."

He ascended the steps to the heavy door, feeling that it all, he and the building and his errand, was part of a hideous dream. It could not be true. It would be comic, if it were not so tragic, that Jacob Hager was here, a prisoner behind the bars, under the charge of murder.

That sense of the unreal was upon him throughout his admission and his conference with the sheriff. The first rough touch of awakening fell as he was led down the little corridor and saw, in passing, that each cell was crowded, that there were familiar faces among those raised to stare at the visitor. He recognized Casper Enpolt, and Jury Post, and Conrate Swart; "God help us, it's true," thought Matt.

And henceforth he was wide awake. There was no more room for fancy after his conductor stopped at a steel-barred opening and called, "Jacob Hager! See here. You're wanted."

For Matt's father, disheveled, fagged, but irascible as ever, limped from among the group below

the high window and approached the grating. He gave a grunt at the recognition of his guest. "That you?" he remarked.

"Yes," said Matt in his throat.

He laid one hand against the bars. He wished to touch the prisoner, to show, in some more effective fashion than by the poor means of speech, how complete were his sympathy and devotion.

"What ye gawpin' at?" asked Jacob tartly. "Ain't ye never seen me before? I swan, ye act so. That's a pretty way to cheer a man up, jes' to stan' there, an' not to say a darned word."

"I can't think what to say," pleaded Matt. "I feel so much."

"Ye might talk about a lawyer. If ye hed a grain o' sense, or ever hed hed, you'd know I want a lawyer."

His complaining tone, pitched in the same key in which Matt had often heard him demand a tardy meal, roused the young fellow effectually from his sentimental pose.

"That's so," said he. "Who do you want, father? Have you thought?"

"O' course I've thought. Them fellows," nodding his head in the direction of the men whispering together beneath the window, "they're all for 'Lisha B. Gallup. To hear 'em go on, you'd s'pose there never was sech another man made as 'Lisha B. Gallup."

"Well, father, he is smart."

It was an incautious recommendation. Old Jacob's resolve to rule had resented the others'

opinions. His son's assertion fired the contrary spirit to immediate action. "I guess Mossy Mix is good enough for me," he remarked.

"Oh, father! Why, Mr. Gallup is older; and he's better read in the law" —

"How do ye know he is?"

"I mean, he's had more experience. And then Mossy Mix is always laughed at here" —

"I guess he's good enough for me. 'Cordin' to Adem Mix, he's the smartest lawyer anywheres 'round. I guess I'll have Mossy."

"Oh, of course his family think everything of him. But, father," — Matt uttered a despairing groan, — "this is a matter of life and death!"

"I don't see how. They can't do nothin' to me."

The grizzled jaw was set. The faded eyes flashed defiance into his. "I tell ye I never did like 'Lisha B. Gallup. Him an' his brother Amos they went to school with me. I never thought much of 'em. 'Lisha he was always foot o' the spellin' class. An' I'm goin' to have Mossy Mix."

"There are other men we could get" —

"You git Mossy Mix."

Perhaps he was touched by his son's harassed expression. Perhaps he was grateful for Matt's forgiveness. But as the young man turned, disheartened, away, his father growled abruptly, "Say! See here. Come back."

His voice ceased, and something seemed to choke him. His features worked painfully.

"Well?"

"You go to Mossy first thing."

"Yes. And then what do you want?"

"Ye might," Jacob's fingers clutched convulsively at the bars, — "ye might as well — go to see your mother."

Matt faced about, and confronted him. Son and father looked into each other's eyes. "Do you mean," Matt demanded hoarsely, "that you're asking me to go back home?"

The fingers quivered in their hold on the steel framework. There was a pause of tremendous effort. "I want ye should tell her how I be," said Jacob finally. "I — I — Don't ye see I'm askin' ye?"

He struck his thigh with his clinched fist, snapping out the query in the old contentious tone. Matt recalled his own threat of the morning that he left the farm. His face whitened. His nails dug into the palms of his restless hands. The determined nature struggled against itself. "Father," he announced, "I was going home anyway. I should n't have waited for you to ask me. I thank you, though."

"That's all right," and Jacob shuffled away.

There was to be one gleam of brightness across this day for Matt. As he went around the farmhouse, on his way to the kitchen door, he met Phe Colton, hurrying up from the cut 'cross lots over the hill. They started and smiled involuntarily at sight of each other. "Oh, Matt," cried Phe, "I'm so glad to see you! I came on an errand to Gitty."

"That was very kind," he answered, "and she'll be pleased. How are you all at your house?"

He paused, at the porch step, to put this question. As he had parted from the doctor but two hours earlier, it did not seem one of special moment. Yet Phe lingered to answer him. "We're pretty well," she said, curling her bonnet strings. "But then — don't think anything about us. I must tell you how sorry I am for you."

He looked down at her. She looked up at him.

"Thank you," he whispered.

"Phe Colton, is that you?" called Gitty from the milk cellar. "Who's that you're talking to?"

"Why, Matt!"

"Matt? Is he here? Mother, here's Matt."

Maria and her daughter hastened out to greet him, while Phe was vexed that she should have blundered upon such a scene. Nor could she understand that, to characters so unused to expression, the presence of an outsider was a relief.

"I thought, at first, it was Almiran," Gitty remarked directly. "Have you seen him to-day?" She turned almost defiantly upon Phe, who appeared frightened, and shook her head. "I don't know what to make of it," Gitty continued. "He's always been such a good friend to us. And he ain't been near us — since."

She was beyond pride, beyond even jealousy. She felt only that she must penetrate this mystery of his absence. Phe went up to her, and took her hands. "Oh, my dear," she began, then clasped the girl about the neck, and fell to crying, "that's why I came. Allie just told me. They have arrested Almiran, too."

But the day's disasters had not yet been counted. So Phœbe found when she returned home that night. She ran back by the same shorter path through the fields, and so down along the blueberry ridge to the barn of her father's farm.

Here, to her surprise, she found Jemima Lane and Allie driving home the cows. "Why, how is this?" she asked, standing at the bars. "Where is Henry Fisher?"

Jemima strode forward and seized a milk pail. Phe noticed that her eyes were red and swollen. "Henery ain't here," was her curt rejoinder.

"That's very evident. But what's the matter? I never saw you out here, Jemima."

"If ye live long enough, you'll see more 'n that to surprise ye. So, Boss! So, Boss! I got 'o do somethin' to work off my feelin's. Allie, don't ye try to milk. Ye can't."

"What is wrong with your feelings, Jemima?" Phe inquired. "I don't understand."

Jemima regarded her steadily around the side of the cow she was milking. "It's plain ye don't," said she, struggling to keep down a sob with the snap in her voice. "But nobuddy needs a lantern to go out an' seek for trouble. What do ye suppose?" —

"Why, Phe has n't heard about it," Allie interrupted. "About an hour ago" —

"You hush, Allie Colton. Let me tell her. What do ye suppose that poor fool's done now?"

"What poor fool?"

"Henery Fisher. He's went and been arrested for an Injun."

CHAPTER XXII

ONE SHALL BE TAKEN

It is not what you lose, but what you have daily to bear that is hard. — W. M. THACKERAY.

THOSE were stirring days for Allie Colton. He was too young to feel the common terror, save as that vague awe and that sense of adventure which are so dear to a child. He liked to bustle into the house with bits of information he had gathered here and there. He liked to evoke his mother's and his sister's cry of dismay, or Jemima Lane's shrill scolding. Dr. Colton was busy in the "sickly season" which late summer was apt to bring throughout the country. He had scant time to give his family, who relied on the officious little boy and his news for the larger part of their knowledge concerning what went on about them.

Anti-rent meetings throughout the various patents were protesting against responsibility for the crime of Hager's sale. The governor had offered a reward for the apprehension of Davit Finck and of that lecturer who incited the men to violence and who undoubtedly had been present at the tragedy. Armed men scoured the country, two companies of volunteers protecting the officers in making their arrests.

"Jail's chuck full," Allie announced breathlessly. "They've got to put up a new building. Crazy Dan and a lot of men are at work on it now. You just ought to see 'em hurry."

Jemima fell to berating him for tracking up her kitchen floor.

"And they've put Omar Mix in jail," he continued. "Ain't that dreadful? A boy not much bigger'n me."

"Pooh!" cried Jemima. "He's twice as big as you. I wisht you'd march right out o' here, Allie Colton. You talk so fast ye make a body's head ache."

She watched for the doctor that night, and, while he was stabling his horse, ran down to the barn, her apron flung over her head.

"Doctor," she greeted him, "I've been thinking: Allie says they're put to it for room over there at the jail."

"Yes," he answered, unharnessing Sam, "I believe they are."

"Why can't Henery Fisher be let out on bail?"

The doctor looked around at her quickly. "I doubt whether that is possible. Even if it were, I have n't the money myself."

"Shucks," said Jemima, "I did n't mean you! It ain't more'n dishonesty, I call it, to do your givin' out o' another man's pocket."

"Then what did you mean, Jemima?"

"Why, I've got a little saved up. I reckon it would be enough."

The doctor hesitated. "I hate to hint such a

thing, but don't you see you would be certain to lose it? Henry Fisher is just the sort of fellow to run away."

Jemima stared at him in wonder. "Why, land sakes," she exclaimed, "that's what I mean! I'd expect him to jump his bail. And goodness knows 't would be wuth it, to git the poor fool out o' harm's way."

"Oh, well," said the doctor soothingly, "I've no idea Henry will be severely punished. I will ask, but I am afraid he must stay where he is. However, the trials begin next week and he is likely to get off easily. Public feeling will be satisfied with revenge before it reaches him. The leaders, Davit Finck and Zielle and old Hager — they are the ones to suffer."

He had given Demosthenes a lift in his chaise that morning, and the young lawyer's despondency oppressed the doctor. Omar's arrest had shaken his brother's nerve, but as Dr. Colton reflected, such egotism should balance that, and he was not prepared for the hints Demosthenes dropped as to his client's case.

It was a most unfortunate conjunction — the obtuse obstinacy of old Jacob forced to mate with the conceit of Mossy Mix. Nothing but a willful holding to his word kept Jacob Hager from repudiating the services so offered. His efforts at repression, his increasing insight into the power of the law mingled with his contempt for Demosthenes and his undying rage at his confinement, and drove him to a frenzy.

To Matt's surprise his father recalled him one day as he was taking his departure. "Say," he whispered, his face against the bars, "Doc Colton was here to-day."

"Was he?"

"Yes; to see that hired man o' hisn. Say! He seems like a sensible kind o' man!"

"I think he is."

"Say! Why don't ye tell him what Mossy Mix wants? Hey? See what he says."

"Very well," Matt agreed. "I will."

He went out of his way to the doctor's house on the road home to the Mayham place, and was rewarded by finding not only her father, but Phoebe seated beside him on the front steps. Nor had the older man forgotten the revelation which amused him at the Anti-rent lecture. He made room for their guest and, when Phoebe rose to go as Matt explained his errand, the doctor placed a detaining arm about her. "No, no, stay, child," said he. "I'm sure Matt won't mind."

"I'll be glad to have her," was the prompt reply.

Dr. Colton smiled sadly. He felt sorry for Matt. His first impulse was to comfort him. But no proud parent could desire that connection for his only daughter. The smile ended in a sigh.

"Well, what is it?" he suggested, to fill a slight pause. "You want my opinion, Mathice?"

"Yes, sir. You see it's like this." Matt leaned forward on the lower step to meet the doctor's eyes. His face was white, but he held his head as haughtily

as ever. "My father is indicted for murder. Demosthenes is afraid he may not be able to clear him, though father swears he never fired his gun. But you know how he talks. He did threaten everything if he or his property was touched. Mossy is scared. I can see that. And he's determined father shall plead guilty of manslaughter in the first degree."

There was an instant of strained silence. Phe wondered if Matt knew, since it had grown so dark, that her eyes were wet with tears as she looked at him. I think he knew.

"It's a desperate fix," said the doctor finally. "I see."

"Yes, it's desperate," Matt repeated.

"There's not much evidence, I should judge, against any of the prisoners: I mean, that one of them fired the fatal shot."

"No, sir. So Demosthenes says. The evidence must be circumstantial, and it's flimsy. But he says, too, that the one thing no case, no matter how strong, can stand, is general sentiment. And that's dead against the Indians — at present."

The doctor rubbed his spectacles with his bandanna handkerchief. "That's so, Matt," he replied. "Now — you want my honest opinion, of course?"

"Of course, sir. I'm not a baby."

"Well, then, I do think there will have to be some scapegoats in this affair. It is hard to trace the crime home to any one of those men. Unfortunately your father was vehement and conspicuous.

And his rifle was at hand where in the confusion he might have shot, although we know he did not because he says so. I'm afraid Demosthenes is right. The only chance lies in a plea to a lesser offense."

Matt's brown fingers worked as they clasped about his knee. "Yes, sir," said he quietly.

"It's best to face the worst, is n't it?"

"Oh, yes. Thank you. I'll tell father."

Phe felt a desperate need to console him, he seemed so desolate, so alone. "There's just one thing to be thankful for," she interposed, — "that you are free of all this — of suspicion even. Every one knows you were not there."

He dropped his head on his hands. "Thankful for that!" he repeated. "If you could guess the sneak I feel, when I see those poor fellows penned up in jail, and remember how completely I was one with them a little while ago! It was like cowardice, my not taking part in the sale — that Almiran Sweet should be there, and I safe miles away. I hate myself because I stand so far outside it all."

"That is morbid, my boy," was the doctor's gentle comment.

"Oh, I suppose so. These are no times for philosophy." He sat in silence, a moment longer, and then he rose to his feet.

"Must you go?" Phe murmured timidly.

Her father's deep voice began a like sentence of hospitable intention, yet it was the girl Matt answered. He glanced up at her, standing above him on the step. She wore a white gown sprinkled with little flowers. It was the same dress which had

brushed against his knee that happy evening in church. With the moonlight around her she seemed robed as a lovely saint. Her pure, sweet face bent toward him and he threw his head back to look at her.

"Yes, I must go," he answered. "I don't belong to myself any more. Between cousin Mark, and my mother and Gitty, and — and father, I am not a free man now."

"No one of us is free, Mathice," said the doctor. "The uttermost we can hope for is to do good, and not harm, to those with whom we are bound together. And that, you know, you do."

"How is Gitty?" Phe interpolated nervously.

He shook his head. "I can't tell. I wish you would go to see her and find out what is wrong. Maybe it's because I don't understand girls, but Gitty seems to me to take all this worse even than my mother."

"I'll run over there to-morrow," Phe assured him. But she was not to keep her word.

When Matt rode up to the jail on the following morning carpenters were busily raising the new building. Crazy Dan tapped out a blithe tune with his hammer, apparently absorbed in his task. Yet the sight of the young fellow brought up perhaps the last time they had met, in Squire Mayham's garden. He hesitated, feeling for the thread of association eluding his mental grasp. Finally, his eyes on the newcomer tying his horse to the hitching-post, he slowly descended the ladder.

"Two men shall be in the field; the one shall

be taken, and the other left. Watch ye therefore ; for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning ; lest coming suddenly, he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch."

He advanced until he stood directly in Matt's path.

"Yes, yes, Dan," he cried impatiently. "That's so. Let me pass, will you ? I'm in a hurry."

"And they all with one consent began to make excuse. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."

"Yes, I understand. Let me pass, that's a good fellow."

Adem Mix had come up behind them. His worn features lighted in a fleeting show of interest other than in the affairs of his youngest son. "Don't you see," he observed, "what the poor cuss is trying to tell you ?"

"No. What ?"

"Do you mean you hain't heard the news ?"

Matt made an indifferent gesture of dissent.

"Sho ! I did n't know that. I supposed everybody had heard. Why, Dr. Colton died last night."

CHAPTER XXIII

GITTY SPEAKS HER MIND

"Is there no death, then, for the spoken word?"

MATT stared, as if stupefied. "Why, that can't be," he gasped. "I saw him, myself, last night."

"Maybe you did. But he was found dead in his bed this morning."

And already, in that second of time, the fact had become familiar, taking its place among the sorrows which crowded forward insistent to be faced. Matt mourned the wise friend whom he had come to value during the Squire's illness. His heart ached for Phe. Yet the urgent thing was to hurry away with this intelligence to his father, and repeat advice which had been among the last words of their counselor. He found Jacob, too, so wrapped in the possibilities of his own affairs as to be beyond caring greatly for what went on outside them. He cried, "I want to know!" at Matt's announcement. He was most affected, however, by what the doctor had said, listening eagerly and with an outburst of disappointment at its purport.

"I thought he'd tell me to hold on," he confessed.

For it seemed impossible to make Jacob Hager

see his danger. He had so far refused to receive visits from his wife or daughter. That they should be witnesses of his bondage, his humiliation, was too bitter to his pride, and he confidently believed, as he asserted, "'Tain't any use. I'll be out an' home ag'in 'fore long."

Yet, although he despised the fears of Demosthenes and Mathice, he must listen to those set forth by his fellow prisoners. He noticed that their lawyers were worried. He heard doubts expressed as to whether Storm Zielle's life could be saved. Gradually an undefined dread had crept through the thick vanity of ignorance. Matt perceived the mental struggle, and pushed it on. "Casper and Conrate Swart," said he, "and Jury Post are all going to plead guilty to manslaughter. Casper told me so. They think it's their only chance."

"But I ain't guilty," old Jacob persisted.

It was evident this was the point of contention, and that he failed to comprehend what the plea involved. Desperate as they were, Demosthenes and Matt agreed to keep him in ignorance. The awakening would be frightful, and yet it was better than if it came in time to complicate their only hopes of rescue. "I would n't give that for his life," Demosthenes had declared, with a snap of the fingers, "if he holds out like Zielle and Nicelas Mann. They have n't the ghost of a show."

"Well," old Jacob slowly decided, eyeing his son, "if the rest is goin' to, I s'pose I might as well. They ain't any use o' my holdin' out alone, an' bearin' all the blame."

"No," Matt assured him eagerly. "You must do the best you can for yourself. Shall I tell Demosthenes you want to see him?"

"Ye might," was the grudging concession.

Possibly Matt was enabled to bear the many cares of this time from their very number, which forced him to go from one to another, and prevented his dwelling upon any single worry. He went from the Squire's sick bed to the jail, from his father to the lawyer, and then to report to Maria and Gitty. Here he learned, concerning Dr. Colton's death, some further details, such as women contrive to gather even from isolation. "The funeral's to be at the Episcopal church," his sister told him, "on Thursday at four o'clock. You going?"

"Why, yes," he said instantly, "we must go. I don't quite see how I'm to take the time, but I shall."

Gitty fell to crying. "If your mind is set on it," she whimpered, "I suppose it's got to be. Anybody'd think, though, I had enough to stand, without getting harrowed up by a funeral."

Her mother, staring listlessly from the window, moved her head slightly at that. "Anybody'd think," she retorted, "you might have more feeling for a girl that's lost her father."

This reproach served to increase Gitty's tears, and distracted Matt by a scene of hysteria. Nevertheless his sister promised to accompany him to the church on Thursday.

It was the one way he knew of showing his sympathy. To write a note, or to send flowers to the

mourning family, lay beyond his experience. Attendance at a funeral was common neighborliness, and the little church was crowded that summer afternoon. With all the distractions of the past three weeks, a death so sudden, and of so popular a man, stirred the entire community. There was, likewise, some slight curiosity. Many of those present were unaccustomed to a church funeral, or to the Episcopal service. They had hearkened to strange stories of what happened within those walls, and here was an opportunity to verify them.

The congregation to which Matt belonged was not one requiring a high order of intelligence nor culture in its head. The young man had often heard from a coffin-side confidential and colloquial prayers, with private matters dragged ruthlessly into an interminable sermon. He possessed no knowledge of such majesty, such reverent beauty, as opened out before him to-day.

He was startled by Mr. Wakefield's appearance, his slow walk to the door. He did not guess what it signified. He caught the roll of wheels outside, and the heavy tread of feet. There followed a little silence, and then—those words that have thrilled the heart throughout centuries of woe pierced the breathless hush:—

“I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord.”

Gitty noticed that those about her rose. She sprang to her feet, and her brother followed. The white-robed figure passed them, leading the bearers with the coffin.

Matt's gaze fell for an instant pityingly upon the widow and Allie, who held her hand. But he saw Phe, who followed her mother, and after that he saw no one else. The girl's delicate loveliness was enhanced by her black frock. Her sad face, set in a little white bonnet with its folds of crêpe, brought tears to his eyes and a sob to his throat. It was unbearable that she should suffer and he do nothing.

The sublime sentences rang henceforth upon deaf ears for Matt Hager. He looked straight at Phœbe throughout psalter and lesson and hymn. He prayed for her in the collects, and he followed in the line of wagons to the grave, so absorbed in thought of her that Gitty's well-intentioned comments struck him as an offense.

After the committal service, Mr. Wakefield said a few words to the small group of mourners, thus setting the example for others. Matt observed this, and, feeling at his most awkward worst, whispered to his sister, —

“Go and speak to her while I drive up the horse.”

“I don't want to,” Gitty objected shrinkingly.

“You go on,” said Matt.

“Oh, well!” She plucked at her courage with both hands and advanced. He watched till he saw Phe turn toward her before he went over to the tree where Billy was tied.

“What did she say?” he inquired, after Gitty had taken her seat beside him in the buggy.

“Nothing much.”

“What did she say?”

"She just cried a little — and so did I. Then she kissed me. Don't she look sweet in black?"

"Yes," Matt answered.

That hour of dignified sorrow, of a grief without tinge of shame, and which could receive such heavenly comfort, was set against the long weeks that followed, ever after in his thoughts.

The trial of the prisoners began a fortnight after the crime, and continued until October. What hope could be entertained for its outcome must be based upon the fact that the judge was a resident of the county and acquainted with many of the prisoners. His uncle, moreover, was among their counsel. The first charge manifested his strict impartiality, and public sentiment was shown in the jury's verdict against the leaders. Davit Finck had fled the country. Storm Zielle was proved to have been a subordinate chief who was present armed and disguised. Without a particle of evidence that he fired a shot he was found guilty of murder. Nicelas Mann, who had been overheard to ask for a ramrod to reload his gun, was convicted with him. They were sentenced to be hanged upon the twenty-ninth of November.

Besides their families and intimate friends, the court-room was packed during this trial by others desirous to learn from its character what might be expected for the remaining eighty-two prisoners awaiting their turn. Matt peremptorily forbade his sister's presence, and was surprised even in his own discouragement to see the agitation with which she listened to his news each night.

"Why, you act worse than mother," he rebuked her.

Neither could he understand her indifference to his strictures and her persistent appeal that he take her with him "just once" to the jail. Maria Hager had acquiesced in her husband's decision. It seemed an uncalled-for degradation that he should be seen in his abasement by the women over whom he had harshly ruled. But Gitty coaxed — and coaxed in vain — until the night Matt told her of the first verdict. Thereupon she sprang from her seat. "Now you must take me," she said. "If you don't, I swear I'll go alone. I will see Almiran."

"Oh, so it's Almiran?" Mathice stupidly inquired. "I thought all the time it was father."

"I don't care what you thought," she answered. And he saw that this was true.

"All right," said he more gently. "You shall go with me to-morrow."

The memory of his love for Phe softened the criticism with which merely as a brother he would have regarded her wish. Moreover, these two young people each recognized the occasions when dictum from either must be accepted. Matt had agreed at last, and he took Gitty under his protection.

There were other women in the line of visitors. No one noticed the girl, all being too sadly pre-occupied with their own matters. Mrs. Sweet was on the point of leaving her son as they were admitted to the room in the new building

where many of the last to be arrested were confined.

"It's good of you to come to see my boy," she sobbed in her farewell.

Almiran looked pale and careworn after the interview. He nodded to them almost abstractedly, Gitty felt, and asked at once of Matt, "What do you think about the verdict?"

Evidently he had lost all remembrance of their last conversation. It weighed heavily upon Mathice. "Oh, I guess you're all right," he answered. "I know this: if I could stand in your shoes I'd give ten years of my life."

Almiran's jaw dropped. "Why on earth" —

"When I look back," Matt began with intense bitterness, "to the time you told me you were going to quit the Indians, I feel as if I ought to be hung. That you, after all, should be locked up, and me as free as air!"

Sometimes a simple nature goes straightest to the point. Almiran gazed compassionately upon the working features, the clinched hands of his old friend. "Oh, come, now," said he in reassurance, "what good would it do me if you were locked up too? And I'd be here just the same whether you was or not."

At this Gitty pushed her brother aside. "That's the very thing!" she cried passionately. "Almiran, I want to talk to you. I want to ask you something. Can you ever forgive me for getting you into this trouble?"

He regarded her in increasing bewilderment.

"Now whatever do you mean?" he demanded.
"You hain't a thing to do with it, Gitty Hager."

"I have n't? You don't intend to say — why, Almiran, it's killing me! How can you forget it was me that begged and implored you to go to the sale? And you held back."

"True as you live," he protested with a sickly smile, "I had forgot. You see, Gitty, it was all the same. I should 'a' went anyway."

"You just tell me that to make me feel better."

"No, I don't, honestly. I'd 'a' been there when the time come — because it was your father."

Their eyes met. Matt turned away. Almiran's fellow prisoners were paying no attention to the low-voiced conference. All this was so soon an old story to them.

Gitty's lips trembled. They could not form a syllable, and yet they were eloquent. Almiran suddenly beheld himself as a hero. In his sordid and patent peril no consolation could have been so strong.

"I — I can't say anything," the girl stammered at length. "Good-by. You understand."

"Yes," he answered softly, "I know. Good-by, Gitty. Remember what I told you. I'd have went anyhow to the sale."

She pulled Matt's sleeve to lead him away. Then she gave Almiran one last glance. "I guess I'm not likely to forget," she said.

CHAPTER XXIV

OLD JACOB'S PLEA

"O worst imprisonment — the dungeon of themselves !"

SOON after Gitty Hager's visit to Almiran, Jemima concluded to go to see Henry Fisher. "The poor critter 'll think he's forsaken," she told herself in excuse, understanding how he must have relied upon the sight of Dr. Colton each day for encouragement and advice. The shock of the sudden death, the loss of that decided character upon which to lean, would, she knew, fall heavily upon Henry. To console him was a duty so apparent as to make Mrs. Colton and Phe wonder somewhat why Jemima rendered such elaborate apologies for the expedition. She did not even mentally confess that for her own part she wished a talk with Henry, that she missed the daily companionship, the echo to her thoughts, the admiration he gave, and the condescending protection she had extended.

Still, no sooner was she led to the cell where he was confined than she broke in upon his greeting with "Well, I am glad to find ye alone. I did n't expect that. Now we can talk reel comf'able an' nice."

"Yes," said Henry. "We've been all moved around sence the new buildin' was built. Ol' Jacob Hager an' me is the only ones in here. An' his trial's goin' on."

"Well, however," Jemima answered, "I'm free to say it's a blessing. Ye'll want to hear all about the poor doctor."

"Wan't it turrible?" Henry exclaimed plaintively. "I declare for it, Jemimy, I boo-hooed jest like an infant. I did so."

"An' small wonder. If ever there was a blessed man gone straight to glory" —

"Jemimy," Henry interposed. "How *be* they goin' to git along?"

"Well, there, Henery Fisher," she replied in unaffected admiration, "sometimes you do act reel sensible. They ain't another soul made that remark to me."

"I s'pose they ain't nobuddy but you an' me knows jest how they're sitooated, mebbe."

"That's it. An' that's why it did seem's if I'd got 'o git to hev a talk with you, or else I should give up. You an' me are the only ones that understand's. Why, Henery, they're in straits: that's what they are."

Henry blinked his big white eyes. "Ain't they anything they can do?"

"Sech as what, pray? Mis' Colton's the smartest woman in Farley, be the other who she may. She can turn her hand to anything. But how much is they here to turn her hand *on*? That's what I'd admire to know."

"That's so," acquiesced Henry as usual.

"An' Phe's capable. But what's it worth? She can play the instrument" (Jemima referred to a melodeon), "an' cook an' sew reel well. But who is they in Farley to cook an' sew for? You tell me that."

"I guess you're right," Henry said, shaking his head. Then, from the depth of his sympathy, he ventured an original remark, always dangerous for him. "They're proud, too," he observed. "They would n't like to work."

Jemima surveyed him in a disdain all too familiar. "Much you know about it. They've got pride, o' course. We've all got it, one kind or another. Some folks's lies in braggin' what they can do, an' some folks's in what they can't. Some are proud o' seemin' better off 'n what they be, an' some in seemin' wuss. They's women in this town act as if nobuddy'd suspect they was good housekeepers without they stood out in the front yard in a caliker aporn with their sleeves rolled up. I always feel as if they're cryin' to all an' sundry, 'Jes' look a' me, how hard I work.' That's their kind o' pride. Mis' Colton's is the sort that keeps herself to herself. It don't poke what she says, nor does, nor thinks in other folks's faces. Ye can call that pride, if you're so disposed. Seems to me it's dignity."

"All right," said Henry. "Mebbe it is."

"An' as for what they'll do — when's your trial comin' on, Henery?"

"I do' know. Not for sev'ral weeks. I guess I ain't in any danger, Jemimy."

He looked wistfully into her firm, keen face. Both had up to this avoided the topic as one would hesitate to touch a wound. Jemima's attack of desperation found the young man unprepared. "Oh, no, you ain't in a mite o' danger," she hastened to assure him. "The doctor tol' me so himself."

"You heard" — Henry's voice faltered, his eyes still sought her face — "about Zielle an' Nicelas Mann? They're goin' to be hung."

"An' no wonder. Ringleaders they were, as you might say. They won't any harm come to you. Don't ye fret."

The slam of doors interrupted them, the clatter of feet, the approach of men. "What's that?" cried Jemima, whirling about.

"Why," said Henry, much surprised as he craned his neck to peer over her shoulder, "it's ol' Jacob Hager. How comes it they're bringin' him back a'ready? His trial can't be through."

The little figure led between two constables was bent and shaking. Jacob had not spoken since he learned, at the last moment, the consequences of his plea. He stood listening to the sentence with jaw dropped and eyes protruding. Matt and Demosthenes Mix, seated side by side close to him, caught but could not translate the wild glance he cast at them. They followed him to the jail without a word to each other or to the doomed man. They looked their consternation, which was too entire for speech.

Henry shrank to his own side of the cell as the

other inmate was admitted. Crouching on the edge of his bed he watched furtively the tumbled heap that flung itself on the couch opposite, lying with face buried in the pillow and still never a sound.

Jemima Lane turned to Matt, all her womanly longing to help showing in her face. "What shall we do?" he whispered in reply to her look.

"Tell me what's wrong," was her softly spoken answer.

Matt tried once to utter words which would not come. It was Demosthenes who said, "He has just learned that he is to be imprisoned for life. He did not understand. It came as a surprise."

Jemima eyed through twinkling tears the crumpled figure on the bed. "I mistrust his wife is what he wants," said she.

"Oh, God bless you," Matt answered fervently. "I've been so confused — it was all over so quickly — I never thought of that."

"I'll go git her," Jemima offered.

A guard overheard the promise. He followed her to the door. "You had better bring the girl, too," he volunteered. "It is their only chance if they want to say good-by. He will be taken to Clinton in the morning."

Aghast at this intelligence, which seemed to add frantic haste to her bad news, she drove Sam at the utmost speed she could coax from him, and rattled up to the door of the farmhouse as the silver bow of a new moon was rising over the woods on the hill.

Gitty ran to the vestibule at the summons of Jemima's loud-voiced "Whoa." Her mother followed her in frightened curiosity. Jemima, climbing from the chaise, saw the women peering from behind the door ajar. "It's me," she announced, "Jemimy Lane. I live to Mis' Colton's."

A tremendous interest swallows up self-consciousness. Gitty was no longer bashful or ill at ease. "Oh, yes, I remember," she said, flinging the door open. "Walk in. We're pleased to see you, I'm sure."

Jemima advanced up the path, whip in hand, a threatening figure, if any of the three had thought of the effect. "I can't set," she answered bluntly. "I got 'o git ye both an' take ye back to town. Put on your bunnnet, Gitty. Come along, Mis' Hager. We mus' be quick as ever we can."

Mother and daughter exchanged glances of tired sorrow. "What is it now?" groaned Maria Hager.

"Your husban' ud like to see ye. Matt sent me. Ain't that sufficient?"

"No. There's something more behind." Gitty had disappeared into the house for her slat bonnet. The older woman was obediently descending the steps, but she paused while she spoke and viewed her visitor with suspicion.

Jemima reached out her rough hand to take Mrs. Hager's.

"Well, it's this, if you will have it. He's to be took away to-morrow. You'd like to say good-by."

Maria lifted a quivering face. "Are they going to kill him?" she asked.

"No, no. It's only — you see — Well, he's goin' to be put in prison."

Maria's sigh was of momentary relief. Afterwards she timidly inquired, "Will it be for long?"

"Yes, Mis' Hager."

"How long?"

"For life."

Gitty came down the steps in time to hear her father's sentence. It might have been because the finite mind can comprehend only a limited sorrow; it might have been Jemima Lane's strong nature on which they leaned; however this was brought to pass, the two weak women showed a power of resistance that amazed their companion. They scarcely once broke down throughout the drive, nor during the slight disturbance their arrival made at the jail. Enpolt and Jury Post and Swart had all been given the like punishment upon the same plea. They were also to be carried to state's prison in the morning. Their families were pressing into the jail. There was an unusual confusion and noise.

Matt stood in the corridor waiting for them. He took the hand his mother involuntarily extended and led her, Gitty following, to the cell.

Old Jacob lay where he had thrown himself on the bed. He had not stirred.

"Father," called Matt, "look up. Here's mother come to see you."

Till then he had paid no heed to his son's appeals. When he learned of Maria's presence he

turned as by instinct to her sympathy. He rolled himself from the bed and crossed the room to the bars. His wife cried out at sight of his haggard face.

"Mother," said he hoarsely, "I done it myself. It was my own fault. I would have Mossy Mix."

They stared at him, his wife and children, as if he were demented. And in truth such an admission from such a man implied a mind that was trembling and might fall.

"Matt warned me," the low voice went on. "He tol' me Mossy was a fool. But I would have him. I would n't listen. An' now see what they done to me."

"What?" she asked, not understanding.

"I ain't never goin' to be let out."

Gitty gave an hysterical cry. Her father did not appear to hear her. He was looking earnestly at his wife. "I'm goin' to be kep' like this," he continued, "caged up as long as I live. I ain't goin' to come home ag'in."

Maria wrung her hands in her apron. Matt cast about in his mind frantically for solace. It would avail nothing merely to affirm that Demosthenes' ignorance was in no wise responsible for the verdict. The three men sentenced with Jacob had, unfortunately for the hypothesis, employed the same counsel. There was but one bit of comfort which Matt seized eagerly. "After all, father," said he, "it saved your life."

"Mebbe," Jacob assented. "But I got 'o live that life all through in prison. I can't git out."

Swift as a flash of lightning the unnatural calm was gone. A cunning expression transformed his features. "I won't stay," he added. "I will git out. I'll run away."

"Oh, no, you won't," Maria pleaded. "You'll behave."

He made no reply. This new hope so took possession of him that he ignored their presence.

"Father," his wife ventured timidly after a second of silence; "you know we have got to say good-by?"

He started violently. "Right away?"

"Yes, right away. But is n't it better so?"

She spoke with decision. Like most of her sex Maria Hager could rise to a supreme situation. The difficulty lay in its continuance.

She stretched her toil-hardened hand out to him. "Good-by, father," said she.

"Good-by."

He dropped the fingers pressing his own, took Gitty's nervelessly, and passed on to Matt.

"I shall stay a while longer," his son announced.

Maria set her lips together. She could hear Gitty's sobs, but she had no thought of tears. They were for other griefs than this. She cast upon her husband a last glance that held as much anxiety as sorrow. "You'll behave, father?" she urged.

It was hard for her life-long reserve to say even so much to him. It was harder for his obstinacy to answer as she wished.

"Mebbe," was the utmost he could promise.

They looked at each other — they who had been man and wife for a quarter century. Their timid gaze might tell all their lips refused to utter. And then Matt mercifully led his mother away.

CHAPTER XXV

AT MIX'S

Poverty is a most odious calling. — BURTON.

"OH, goody, goody!" cried Allie Colton, throwing the door wide open. "Henry is n't going to be hung after all."

Phe and Jemima were tying a comfortable in the spare room. Both women dropped needle and worsted at the interruption. "Why, how you startled us, child!" Phœbe expostulated. "You should n't say such dreadful things."

"Well, he is n't," Allie persisted.

"You 'd ought 'o be switched," Jemima declared, resuming her work, "to talk in that col'-blooded way about poor Henery Fisher. What you heard, anyhow?"

"I am not cold-blooded, either," the little boy declared. "I was just glad. And I'm a good mind not to tell you any more — you're so smart."

"Oh, yes, tell us, lovey," coaxed Phe. "Has Henry been tried? It's odd we did n't hear of it."

"He pleaded guilty," said Allie, still rather sulky, "him and a lot of other men. Mr. Gallup told 'em to. They've all been fined. If they pay

the money they're going to be let out. Almiran and Omar Mix too."

Phe and Jemima Lane exchanged significant glances. "What's Henery fined?" asked the older woman.

"Three hundred dollars. Isn't that a lot of money?"

He swung back and forth from his heels to his toes. "I guess I'll run tell mother," he finally announced, and slammed the door behind him.

Phe regarded Jemima anxiously across the quilting frames. "Henry has n't any three hundred dollars," she said, "and there's Mr. Gallup to pay."

Jemima, too, was grave. "I presume he'll have money enough," she answered at length. "Come," thrusting her needle into the coverlet, "things always settle kind of by standin' for a spell. An' we got to git to work. I want 'o go to town before dark."

"Why, what for?" asked Phe, opening her eyes wide.

"Bis'ness," was the curt response. Thereupon Jemima bent to her task.

"She intends to pay his fine," thought Phe.

The Anti-rent trials had lasted for the past two months. During that time twelve men had been sentenced to serve terms of varying length in state's prison. The fines imposed upon those others (thirty in all) who had thrown themselves upon the mercy of the court ranged from five hundred dollars to twenty-five dollars. Omar Mix was

among the thirty-nine who likewise pleaded guilty and whose sentences were suspended. The episode closed temporarily with the commutation by the governor of Mann's and Zielle's sentence to life imprisonment.

Jemima went to the village that afternoon as she had announced. Some time later, while the family sat together about the Franklin stove they heard the clatter of feet on the porch, "There is Jemima now," said Mrs. Colton.

"Henry's with her," Allie added with a child's quick perceptions. "Oh, goody, goody! Henry Fisher's come."

He ran to the door in tumultuous welcome, followed by the others. On the threshold they were met by Jemima, triumphant, smiling. Over her shoulder appeared the shining face of Henry Fisher.

The good fellow was overcome by this his first sight of the old home without its master. The very warmth of his greeting disconcerted him. It was Mrs. Colton, with her fine tact, who relieved his embarrassment by saying, after supper, "I wish you both would come into the sitting-room, please, and let us have a talk together. Phe and I want your advice. There is no one so well qualified to give it."

"They ain't nobuddy that cares more. I'm sure o' that," Jemima answered.

"No, indeed; no one so interested, and understanding so thoroughly how we are placed. Sit here, Henry, won't you? by the fire. Allie, bring

Jemima's rocking-chair. Now, little boy, you may go into the parlor and read if you like."

"I'd rather stay," he announced, sidling up to the speaker. "I want to hear about it too."

Mrs. Colton threw her arm around her son. "Mother does n't like to worry you," she said. "But perhaps it is only right, Phe" —

She looked dependently at her daughter, as she had been wont to look at her husband. Such a character must always have a mental prop, and Phe was beginning to feel the strain that frets a woman who is made head of the household.

"Yes," she replied. "Allie has learned so much of our affairs already, I fancy it would be kinder to tell him everything."

"Well, how *is* it, Mis' Colton?" inquired Jemima.

"How is it?" Henry echoed.

His red hands were outstretched awkwardly upon his knees. He breathed hard, and kept one eye rolled in Jemima's direction.

"It's about as bad as it can be," Phe explained, seeing her mother's hesitation that dreaded to formulate the facts. "Dear father had been unfortunate, you know, before we came to Farley, and of course his practice was not fully established here. We are left with the furniture of this house and the rent paid to the first of March. That much we have."

"And there are lots of things to eat," Allie interposed. "Corn-house's full and the cellar and the smoke-house."

"Yes, dear, I was coming to that. We have provision for the winter. But we must face the fact that our income is cut off and there is no way of making it good. The question is, what are we to do."

"Yes," Jemima agreed, nodding wisely, "I see."

"So do I," said Henry.

"We can't keep the farm after next March. We can't keep you two with us. We have no money."

"I've got some in my bank," Allie interrupted, — "ninety-three cents."

"That is about the amount of my capital," Mrs. Colton continued, smiling tremulously. "Yes, you speak, Jemima. What shall we do?"

She saw that Jemima Lane had something to say.

"We can trade at the store — I mean you can," for she noticed the flush of worry on her mistress's cheeks; "Henry an' me'll find something or 'nother to turn to. But over an' above what you'll need there's barter on this place that'll stand ye instead o' cash. An' as for money (I know ye got 'o have some), I tell ye what I've been thinkin' " —

"Oh, you good Jemima! You have been thinking, then?" cried Phe, relieved.

"We all got 'o think. We can't help that. The thing is to make it o' some purpose. Why not do this, Mis' Colton; the farm's convenient to town, — 't ain't but a mile or so " —

"It's a mile and one eighth," said Allie.

"All right. Now I've spied around consid'able, an' put some questions. I ain't been idle. An' fur's I see, ye could take three or four boarders well as not. They's room enough an' to spare up-chamber. Plenty young men come into town in the winter to go to school. They'd gladly give ye a dollar a week for board."

Phe and her mother sat transfixed by this suggestion. "Do you suppose they would?" the girl faltered.

"It's what they pay all 'round town. You've got sufficient laid by to feed 'em. Eve'ybuddy agrees on't it's the easiest way they is to turn a farm into money. Why don't ye try it?"

"Why don't ye?" said Henry.

"They's two new law students in Mr. Gallup's office. I kind o' sounded him to-day. I ain't a doubt in the world but they'd come. You could fill the house up easy. I should n't wonder a mite if ye could make as much as five dollars a week."

Mrs. Colton gasped at this prospect of wealth.

"It's a lovely plan," exclaimed her daughter.

"An' mebbe," Jemima hinted, with a sidelong glance, "I might be able to help sufficient, if ye had your hands so full, so't you'd conclude to keep me. I could afford to work some cheaper."

"Now, Jemima," Phe expostulated, tears springing to her eyes, "don't say another word. You shall not try to aid us by harming yourself. You could get seventy-five cents a week anywhere else, and you must not stay here for less."

"Well, well, we won't say any more about

that." Jemima turned the subject hastily. "The first thing 's to git the boarders."

A fretted frown fixed itself between Mrs. Colton's brows. Phe raised one hand to her eyes in an attitude of consideration. Jemima's generous heart felt a twinge of guilt.

She had understood in a general way that the Coltons were very poor. Yet, while her monthly wages were paid as promptly as before, it did not come home to her that the three dollars were so serious a loss to the mistress. She had been aware that the present state of affairs could not continue, without seeing that it must end at once. "O' course Henery an' me can find places," she said with apparent irrelevance, "an' not so far away but what we can all keep together, kind of. We'd be lost without this house to come to once in a while. But, first off, we must see you fixed here an' ev'rything ready. Henery Fisher, you better go to bed. Take Allie too. We want to talk this over."

Far into the night the three women consulted as to ways and means. Some outlay was necessary at the opening of their scheme. And whence should be obtained even the smallest sum to which they condensed their requirements?

"Oh, we will manage, mother," Phe reassured Mrs. Colton when she grew white and scared. Yet the girl's heart was heavy. She had led hitherto the sheltered, careless life of a child. She was pushed suddenly into the position of a man fighting for his family's being in a brutal world. The want of a piteously small amount of money weighed

upon her with its resultant scheming, till she felt crushed as if beneath another grief.

One day, soon after their decision, while the matter moved forward with a teasing sloth, she was forced to go to Mix's. She dared not trust her purchases to Allie. Henry had already found a home for the winter at the Hager farm, and Jemima proved too busy to be spared.

"I must make the best bargain I can," thought Phe, "and make it myself to be certain the pennies are stretched as far as they will go. I hate the whole thing; those lounging men sitting around the stove will listen to me and nudge each other. Suppose he should be there! I could not bear that — for him to see how mean and greedy I must be."

She felt the pinch of poverty more acutely from her father's open-handed manner of life, which had left them to such distress, this result forming one of the two-edged evils of extravagance. Phe could confide in no one. She suffered likewise from that reserve wherein her soul cowered in a proud pain from display of poverty. Accustomed to an attitude of implied superiority over these Farley friends, she sickened at the notion that they might now condescend to pity her. "Keeping boarders" was thus harder for Phe than even for her mother, and the trifling incident of considering a cent the more or less at Mix's appeared for the moment the greatest of her trials.

She conducted her purchases in an undertone and with hurried gestures. Josephine Mix aided the selection with a good-natured sympathy, igno-

rant but kindly, to Phe's manifest discomfort. Finally she whispered through the buzz of gossip about the stove, —

"Heard the news up at your house?"

"I don't remember any," Phe answered, trying to be civil.

"It only happened this morning. Squire Mayham had another stroke. He's dead."

"Oh, is he?"

Phe thought at once — her cares were become so sordid — that the Squire had not paid her father's bill. She wondered anxiously whether they would lose this that they had counted upon. Josephine's voice recalled her to the conversation. "Matt Hager'll come into every penny. So pa says. He'll be as rich as a Jew."

"Oh, is that so?" Phe queried aimlessly.

"Yes, indeed. I know it for a fact. My! Think of that elegant house and grounds! And they say it's chuck full of the most splendid things you ever saw in your life, — silver, and china, and cut glass. Pa's went there sometimes. He says you could see your face in the mahogany sideboard. And the table linen was like satin."

"That's very nice," said Phe.

"And carriages and horses. And all them terraces with the stone steps leading down. And a rose walk, and arbors, and summer-houses. I asked pa if there was sufficient to run it with. He did laugh. He says the Squire was as rich as mud. And Matt gets every penny."

"That's nice," Phe repeated; "I'm glad."

"He 'll be a catch, I tell you," added Josephine with a conscious laugh.

Another customer pushed her way forward just then. Phe heard her question, "You heard about Matt Hager?" before she seized her opportunity to slip away.

The thoughts attending her homeward path were in a strange confusion. To himself Matt had praised the sweet humility with which Phe stooped to him and seemed unmindful how far she was obliged to stoop. This was true. Yet no sooner was Matt raised, by all the standards either knew, to an immeasurable height from whence to survey her losses, than Phœbe Colton became bitterly proud.

"I told Josephine I was glad," she said, addressing a katydid clamoring on the wayside wall. "And it was not true. I am a different person, now I am poor. I am selfish, and grudging, and covetous. I believe in my heart I am sorry that he should be so rich."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LADY OF THE AIR CASTLE

He proud and rich, I very proud and poor. — CRABBE.

ONE day, Matt Hager, in examining his cousin's papers, came upon an unopened letter. He found it contained a bill for Dr. Colton's services. Arriving probably at some period of alarm at the invalid's condition, it had been thrust aside at the time and afterwards forgotten. Matt glanced along the column of figures, shamefaced at the neglect, but sentimental with the fancy that Phe's hand formed the pretty, minute characters. "To think of their never hearing from it!" he groaned. "They must despise us all out here. And how am I going to give it to them?"

The big boy, simple, unused to the handling of money, never entertained the notion of a check sent by mail. To him payment meant so many dollars delivered in person to Mrs. Colton, while Phe stood by with crimson cheeks and lowered eyes. He saw it all as in a picture. What he did not see was the pressing need of the amount. Like most men, he had always taken elegance of living and dignified reserve to denote a liberal income. When he heard of the doctor's death, in

common with many less peculiarly interested, he concluded, "Well, I guess they're left pretty well off."

Yet, while there was no conception of Phe's true attitude, this new tie between them brought to him a subtle sensation, not so coarse as power, not so clearly defined as hope. For the first time since he heard of his father's arrest, he began to weave a day-dream with Phe for its heroine.

"If she would have me" —

He sat musing at the huge mahogany desk, with its emptied pigeonholes and shallow drawers drawn out for investigation. He pushed back his armchair and strode over to the chimney corner. With one foot on the fender and his elbow resting on the mantelpiece, he gazed down into the dancing fire reflected in the andirons. He stretched his hand almost timidly toward a silver candlestick, lifting it from its primly set place. He gave a little foolish laugh.

"I believe I'll just take a look around," he thought.

He was safe from observation, no matter what his folly. The servants at the Mayham place were not one with the family as in most Farley houses. In his loneliness Matt endeavored to keep Miss Azubah with him for at least the winter. But her gentle resolution was like a soft pillow assuming its original form as soon as pressure upon it was removed. She had arranged her plans for the future, and when the Squire's death released her, departed forthwith to a new home. His mother

could not be induced to leave the farm, nor was Matt free to forsake his legacy with its countless responsibilities. He passed his days in an isolation splendid to onlookers, forlorn for him who bore it.

So he closed the door on the library, with its faint odor of Russia leather and its row of high-backed chairs. He crossed the wide hall to the foot of the stairs, and, holding his candle above his head, looked up their curving length.

"I can see the flutter of her gown," he mused, "as she runs down the steps to the landing. Then she spies me waiting here, and she comes more quickly. The logs are lighted in the fireplace yonder. The blaze shines out upon her as she draws nearer. It shows her white frock with the little flowers all over it, and the slippers when she holds her skirt aside. Joe has waxed the wood-work till it shines like glass. Suppose she should not heed in her hurry; suppose she slip and I spring forward to catch her"—

He bit his lip over the sweet words running unarticulated through his mind. They had grown too sweet. He trembled, and turned aside.

"Then we would go to the drawing-room," he continued, his fingers upon the knob. "She crosses the floor, leading me, and she asks, 'Shall I play for you, Matt, till the tea-bell rings?' Gitty said she could play. I sit here in my armchair on the hearth," he took up his station, gazing about him, "and she — there — while I watch her. I should sit like this and look."

He drew the chair forward, its claw legs rolling

softly over the Eastern rug. He threw himself into its soft depths and fixed his eyes on the opposite wall. The graceful old spinnet stood open. Candelabra, glistening by Matt's taper in every prism, were mirrored in the rosewood surface. A sheet of yellowed music was spread upon the rack. When they were children, brought to visit their cousin, Matt and Gitty used to pretend that this stately home was theirs and they were man and woman enjoying the somewhat awful grandeur of the drawing-room. To-night Matt pretended once more.

"Her head is hid by the music," he told himself, "so that I cannot see her face. The tune she has chosen is sad, and her touch is very soft. That shadow is the flow of her light gown beside her on the floor. She is speaking to me in the music, and I listen here by the fire."

So he imagined, by and by, that she rose and strolled about the room. He watched her little airs of ownership, adjusting the folds of the damask curtains, or straightening here and there a book on the centre-table, and a carved chair against the wall. At length she came to his side.

"Are you asleep, Matt?" she inquired. "Hannah is calling us to tea."

He started up, his pulses beating thickly. A subdued tinkle sounded from the hallway as if to confirm the fancy. Hannah was summoning the master — ah, but there was no mistress.

Yet the thought had been so humored that henceforth it was easier to go further than to rea-

son and remember. Matt sat alone at the round table, with Joe Murray behind his chair. But across the glitter of glass and silver he saw a figure facing him, he heard the sweet, insistent tone of a girl voice in the chatter of a girl. She was relating the events of a day which he had spent in affairs outside the house.

After the meal he led her back to the study. The long, high settle was pulled out at a right angle with the fire. They sat here side by side, and she read to him from one of the rows of volumes reaching along the sides of the room, seldom opened, richly bound books, — "the classics," Matt had heard them called.

And while the dear voice pronounced the impressive sentences, his mind roved on again. Among the great rooms in the house there was one chamber never opened since Cousin Deidamia's death, save as the maids or Miss Azubah reverently crossed the threshold to see that its spotless order was preserved. Only the other day Matt, passing the door, had been called in to help Sarah in moving the ponderous toilet-table. He recalled the quaint mirror and saw the face of his wife given back by the glass. He remembered tales Gitty had told him of laces laid away in those drawers, of crêpe shawls and delicate garments scented by rose leaves and lavender, of the mahogany wardrobes whose depths disclosed, long ago, for an admiring little girl, gowns of silk that "would stand alone," brocade and satin and a circular cloak of Lyons velvet.

"Phe shall have them all," he concluded.
"Cousin Marcus won't care — now."

The little white gown with its sprays of flowers became, on the instant, too simple. Phe must wear the jewels that once sparkled on Mrs. Mayham's fingers. He must find for her the cameo brooch that pinned the laces at Cousin Deidamia's throat.

Matt's mood had so beguiled him, he had so yielded to its insistence, that he was not fully awakened when, on the following morning, he rode down the avenue on his way to Mrs. Colton. He loathed his errand, but he reflected doggedly that there was nothing to gain by delay. Nor could he wholly regret any excuse which called him to Phe's presence. To-day he went, for his dream's sake, like a glad-hearted boy. He was thorough-going in this as in all things. Resolutely pushing away the memory of disgrace, he had toyed with unrealities until they cheated him into security.

Not only had Matt no intimation of what in Phe's eyes were their relative positions, but he failed to consider all his apparent neglect might mean to her. She was so constantly in his mind, it was so dear a delight to seek her out, that he supposed she understood it was obligation alone that withheld him. His home experience might have served to show a woman takes nothing for granted. As he refused to learn from others, he must pay the price for the fond belief that this creature he raised above all other things created

was, in truth, superior to every feminine fault. So he cantered gayly along the country road to her.

A gray sky bent low over the white land. The trees threw delicate tracery of twig and bough against the soft background that refreshed eyes wearied by the expanse of glistening snow. Matt's high spirits bounded higher still. The motion of his fine horse, the stinging air with its promise of coming storm, the goal to which his face was set, the memory of last night's pastime, most of all the inevitable reaction after months of trouble, — these brought happiness back to him.

Allie spied him in the distance and ran to tell his sister. She was constructing an ottoman in an endeavor to eke out the inadequate furniture of a boarder's room. If Matt had but suspected it, Phe's scissors were snipping at the very French calico gown she had worn last night in his fancy. Her eyes were red from crying over the sale of Sam and the doctor's chaise. This, the day of Matt's returning joy, was the most entirely hopeless, so she felt, that she had ever known.

"I'll answer the knocker," she said primly in response to her brother's offer.

Phe possessed her mother's theories of propriety. A touch here and there removed from her person every trace of a morning's hard work. It was no drudge who opened the door to Matt.

He did not notice that her black gown was cheap and worn. She saw at one glance the fine material of his garments, the band of crêpe about

his arm, the gold-headed riding-whip he carried. This was another Mathice from the farmer's boy, and she was another woman.

There is a curious power in mere clothes. Phe felt at her worst in her old frock, Matt at his best in the mourning outfit Miss Azubah had told him he must buy in honor of the Squire.

"Good-morning," said he with a novel assurance. "May I speak to your mother, please?"

She thought him patronizing. "Certainly," she answered. And his high heart went down.

"Come into the parlor, won't you?" Phe continued in the same sweet frigidity. "I will find my mother. She is upstairs, I believe."

Matt followed her, stumbling over the raised threshold. It was not so she had led him yesterday, nor was this the lady of his air castle. He grasped despairingly at that fleeting bliss. "Don't go," he entreated, standing in the middle of the floor. "I wanted to see you too. Don't go."

"But I must go," Phe expostulated with a distant smile, "if I am to call my mother."

"Maybe you need n't." Matt's wits had utterly deserted him. Never swift of comprehension, he was confused by the crash of his phantasies in their fall. "Maybe you would do just as well," he went on. "I came to pay a bill."

His face grew scarlet. Phe's cheeks turned white. "I will do quite as well," she answered, and held out her hand to him.

Matt drew his wallet sullenly from his breast pocket. To Phe's morbid acuteness it appeared

aggressively plump. The roll of bills from which he selected what he wished represented a fortune for her. He laid these in the outstretched fingers and fumbled in a trousers pocket for the odd change. He brought out a little pile of silver, counting it aloud.

"Is that right?" he asked.

Phe had bitten her lip till it was bleeding. She raised her handkerchief so that he could not see.

"Yes, that is right," she said.

"I had no idea this had been neglected. I only ran across it yesterday. I suppose Cousin Mark was too sick to open the letter at the proper time. I am very sorry."

"It is of no consequence," was the lofty reply.

"She despises me," thought Matt, "because I am rich. While I was poor and in trouble she pitied me. But I do cut a contemptible figure strutting about as the Squire's heir with my father in prison for life."

"He despises me," thought Phe, "because I am poor. He comes here flaunting his riches and forcing me to take his money. It is hateful—hateful of him."

She had not even asked their guest to be seated. The brief interview ended, Matt turned toward the door. "Your mother well?" he inquired.

"Very well, thank you," answered Phe. "I saw Gitty a day or two ago."

"Ah, did you?" said Matt. "Good-by."

"Good-by," she responded promptly.

As he opened the front door Demosthenes Mix

came up the path. He wore the air of one very much at home.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Matt, who was still not altogether responsible for his speech.

But Demosthenes never recognized rudeness if he encountered it. He smiled radiantly upon Mathice. "I live here," he explained in his pompous tones. "You know I gave up my room at father's long ago, when I began to practice in town. And Mrs. Colton has taken me to board for the winter. It is an extremely pleasant arrangement."

"It must be," Matt replied.

CHAPTER XXVII

ON THE WAY HOME

"Rue and thyme grow baith in ae garden."

To Matt Hager the winter passed in a curious medley of feeling. Most of us have a personified conscience, and Phe Colton had been his. So long as he imagined she sympathized with his disgrace, the arrogance he inherited held its head on high. The shame, moreover, was so widespread, the entire community so thoroughly shared crime and punishment, that, although Matt felt both keenly, he had comprehended neither as it appeared before him now. For with Phe's support withdrawn he saw the situation, not indeed as it was, but in the distorted proportions of a mood altogether alien to his temperament. He stood, in his imagination, before Phe and before all his world, disloyal to Anti-rent in its hour of need, rewarded by riches and honors for his treachery — and his father suffering in his stead.

This is what he fancied men were saying as they pointed him out or whispered together. He never guessed that the notice he excited was aroused by comments on his luck, — on the statement, "That young fellow there is the richest chap in the

county." More and more he kept to himself. His daily visit to his mother enlivened his sensitiveness, for she could talk of nothing save his father and the painful details of Jacob's condition. There were letters to write to the prisoner, and expectations, never fulfilled, of some word in reply.

Yet Mathice was too resolute and confident to be always cowed. Again and again in a revolutionary spirit he started up declaring he should go to Phe Colton and demand of her whether love between them was indeed impossible. Then the remembrance of her cold courtesy alarmed him and he drew back. With the spring arose an excuse at which he grasped to take a long business journey in the West. His normal healthy state of mind worked uppermost in the bustle of last arrangements, and it was the old Matt Hager who said to Gitty on the day before he left home, "I suppose I might as well drop in and bid the Coltons good-by."

"Why, yes," she assented indifferently. "I should think you would want to."

On his way through Farley Matt stopped before the little office of Demosthenes Mix. He had repeatedly offered to pay the lawyer for his services to old Jacob, and repeatedly been told with a wave of the hand that Demosthenes was too busy to bother with the matter at present. Matt knew this to be partly the pose of the man and partly the vanity of a young worker magnifying his work's success. Such demonstrations from Mossy Mix had amused him once. At present they irritated

Mathice, because, without formulating the idea, he was conscious this aforetime despised rival seemed nowadays ridiculously contented, risen on the wings of a secret happiness above sordid considerations of money-making. Matt was in a determined humor as he entered the office and announced he had come "this time" to discharge his debt.

"Oh, well," conceded Demosthenes with his usual condescension, "as you like, as you like. I will look up the account directly." He fluttered the leaves of a ledger. "So I hear you are going to travel?"

"Yes," said Matt, standing grave and quiet by the door; "I am."

"And on the whole I should consider it a very sensible course to pursue."

"It is," was the gruff reply. "I am going West on business."

"I mean," continued the unruffled flow of words, "that over and above any mercenary motives, you must be weary of your isolation in that out-of-the-world Mayham place. I have thought of you often and pitied you this winter, Mathice. For one I have never envied you your inheritance."

Matt smiled slightly at the boyish spite. Then he grew sober. "Heaven knows there is no reason why you should," he answered.

Demosthenes was copying items from the ledger to a slip of paper, but he talked on meanwhile as if the action were automatic. "Yes, I have ample cause to be satisfied. There is no need, as you justly observe, why I should covet your goods. I have enough of my own."

"I did not justly observe anything of the sort," interrupted his listener. "And why should you be so thundering happy all at once?"

Demosthenes smiled fatuously over his figures. "Why should I not?" he retorted. "I am in a delightful home, and I look forward to one more delightful still. I am partially engaged to be married."

"What do you mean by partially engaged?"

The rough tone, the manner almost threatening, were lost upon Demosthenes. "I mean," he answered glibly, "that Phœbe Colton has promised conditionally to marry me."

Matt extended his hand for the bill. "How much is it?" he asked. And, on seeing the amount, he added ten dollars to his payment. "I'll give you that for a present, Mossy," he swaggered.

Demosthenes colored — but he took the money; while Matt felt something of the teasing spirit of his Indian days in the revenge of humiliating this enviable man.

He did not go to bid Phe good-by. He chose the shortest road to his home, where he tried to cheat himself into fancying there was so much left undone that he should have no time to think. He left his horse at the stable and walked along the flower garden to the house.

Crazy Dan was setting up a trellis by the rose-bed. He smiled on the tall, broad-shouldered fellow striding down the path between the lilac hedges. Purple plumes flung out their fragrance as they swung in the sunlight above the young heir's head.

Amid the bloom and beauty his dark face cast a shadow. It awakened the confused brain to an inevitable commentary : —

“There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owner thereof to their hurt. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself ? ”

“What indeed ? ” Matt bitterly repeated.

Mr. Rockwell, likewise boarding with Phe and her mother, announced at the supper-table that he understood Mathice Hager was going West for a long stay. “He has grown proud,” he added. “I met him, this noon, on my way from school. He was riding toward the Mayham place and I in the footpath as near as I am to you, Miss Phœbe. He never once looked at me. To think of the times I have thrashed that boy ! I don’t like such ways.”

“Neither do I,” said Phœbe with burning cheeks. The next moment she rebuked Allie for greediness. His mother motioned him not to answer. It was Mrs. Colton who led the conversation away from Matt Hager.

The Squire’s heir found sufficient excuse to keep him from his dreary home until late in the autumn. He had lingered on in Iowa under one pretext after another, until repeated misspelled appeals from the farmer left in charge convinced him that his presence was necessary at Farley.

Matt’s return took place in the tumult of an exciting election. The Anti-rent contention had come to seriously affect State politics. In this year — 1846 — the Downrenters united with the Whigs on

a candidate for governor, with the Democrats on one for lieutenant-governor. They supported a friend to the cause as State senator, and twelve men for the Assembly. The election proved a sweeping victory for the tenants, and was felt in Farley to be the more telling from the distrust caused by the crime of Hager's sale. There was such rejoicing as the sleepy town had never displayed for a favorite's arrival at the White House.

Matt stopped to inform his family as to the result. "Of course Mossy Mix has to scold," he remarked, "and shake his head, and wonder if after all it's for the best. That fellow lives more on his superiority to the rest of us than he does on meat and drink."

"Oh, I forgot you had n't heard," Gitty answered. "We're a little suspicious of Mossy lately. Did you know he was related to Lawyer Van Zandt?"

"Why, no," was Matt's reply. "Everybody here is related to everybody else. But I never knew that. What difference does it make, anyway?"

"Folks think it might have made a difference in what he did for his clients."

Matt interrupted her quickly: "Stuff and nonsense! Don't let mother get hold of that."

"No, I have n't. But it has hurt Mossy. People seem prejudiced."

Matt's lip curled disdainfully. "Oh, the fellow's honest enough," he acknowledged in grudging truthfulness. Here he changed the subject.

"Well, I'll be in to-morrow evening to stay with mother if you want to go to singing-school." He took up his hat and began revolving it on his hand.

"Mossy Mix going to be married?"

"Not that I know of. Who to?"

Matt eyed the opposite wall attentively. "Phe Colton," said he in his throat.

A light of relief leaped to Gitty's face. "I could n't tell you," she answered. "Maybe he is, he's after her so strong. But then," candidly, "so is Mr. Rockwell, and that student in Mr. Galup's office, and — and other folks, too. I don't know, I'm sure."

"Well, good-night," said Matt.

Phe had rented both her melodeon and her services as a musician to the singing-class for the season. Gitty was leaning on the ridiculous little box, talking to the player while the company assembled, on the following evening, when she saw her companion start violently and change color. "What's the matter?" she queried.

"Oh, nothing."

"Why, yes, there is. You're as red as a piney." Gitty glanced over her shoulder. Demosthenes was entering the room. "Oh, ho," she cried affectedly. "So that's how it is! I was asked not twenty-four hours ago if you were going to be married."

Phe's hands fell on the keys with a crash. "Gitty Hager," said she, "if you have any pity in you, you'll help me to get rid of that man."

"Whatever do you mean?"

"I mean I am desperate. He won't take 'No' for an answer. He is incapable of it. He's so consumed with self-love that he can't see any one else does n't love him just as much. It is n't that he won't see it, but he can't. And I have to treat him decently because he's a boarder. I cannot fret mother, and I hardly ever see Jemima since Mrs. Sweet has been sick. I'm at my wit's end, Gitty."

Her voice shook. It could not have continued to speak longer. "Why, now," urged her practical confidante, "can't you use Mr. Rockwell to discourage him?"

"But I don't want to lead him on either. They're all boarders. You don't understand how hard it is. We need the board."

Gitty had never before heard her speak with such freedom. She gazed down into the lovely eyes, her heart torn between sympathy and envy.

"Well, you are too pretty, that's a fact," she said.

"Don't laugh at me."

This was as the teacher called them all to order.

Almiran edged his way down the bench toward Gitty as the evening wore along. She detected the movement, of course, with all that it implied. And here was the moment for carrying out that resolution which had formed itself while she sang at random with the others, and her eyes studied Phe Colton's face. At length they were dismissed and Almiran drew near.

"May I wait on you home?" said he.

He deemed it the merest form, but Gitty shook her head. "You take Phe Colton."

"What for?"

The blank expression, the reluctant tone, set her pulses to faster beating. After all, it was not so hard to be generous. "Because she is alone," she urged.

"So are you."

"Oh, Almiran! I can go with Henry Fisher — unless he wants to take Jemima," she was human enough to add.

Almiran chuckled. "More likely, for the matter of that, Jemima would see him home. But Mossy Mix is waiting for Phe."

"That's the very reason. She does n't want to be beholden to Mossy Mix."

"Oh, I see," said Almiran good-naturedly. "Well, you wait here, and I'll ask Henry and Jemima" (Jemima was acting as nurse for Mrs. Sweet) "to take Phe along with them. They'll be glad and proud to do it."

This was accomplished while the object of their stratagem lingered by the melodeon hoping to tire out her would-be escort in the entry. And Almiran, tucking Gitty's hand under his sleeve, set out upon their long trudge through the snow. The recent dialogue had left him curious.

"I never thought," he observed presently, "you were so interested in Phe Colton's affairs. She been complainin' to you about Mossy?"

"I should n't repeat it if she had. And it wan't that — altogether — made me ask you to take her home."

"What was it, then?"

No answer.

"What was it, then?"

"I supposed you'd rather."

"Did n't you think I knew my own mind?"

Gitty's hand trembled on his arm. "No," she answered.

Almiran stood still in the path. "What makes you say that, Gitty Hager?"

"Because it's true." She faced him defiantly.

"You're just fascinated with Phe. You have been from the start. And to-night I made up my mind I'd say to you, 'You go with her and welcome.'"

"Are you mad at me?" demanded Almiran in consternation.

"Why, no. Don't you see I'm not? Almiran, it's like this: what you did for me, a year ago — because I asked you, I should say, and you could n't refuse — I can't ever forget it. Nor yet all you suffered afterwards. One good turn deserves another. I always thought honestly Phe did n't care for you. To-night something made me see maybe you would n't have such hard work if you wanted to wait on her. After all I owed you, 't was the least I could do to tell you so. And now you know how it is."

Almiran began to laugh. "I ain't a fool," said he. "You mean, of the two, if 't was to save herself from Mossy Mix, Phe Colton would take me. But," in a graver tone, "I don't want to keep company with her, Gitty. I want to keep company with you."

"Oh, Almiran Sweet!"

"I do so. You see — it's this way." He put his hand underneath her chin and peered into the depths of her hood. "I did like Phe. I like her now — some. For all that, what I done for you — what you make so much of — don't you see, it just made me love you, Gitty. I could n't look at another girl after that."

"You've hid it pretty well," pouted the blissful creature, bridleing and smiling. "How was I to suspect? You have n't been to see me, nor taken scarcely any notice."

"That was the very reason. I felt," he stammered for lack of a word, "kind of — delicate about it. It seemed as if you'd think I'd bought the right. Don't you understand?"

"I understand one thing," she cried, clasping her mittens together fervently, "that I'm the happiest girl in this world, if you say it of your own accord, and not" —

"And not what?"

"And not because you saw all the time how much I thought of you."

"Why, I think just as much of you," Almiran expostulated. After a second's consideration, he added, "And I really don't know but more."

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THE WINDOW

"They have most power to hurt us that we love.
We lay our sleeping lives within their arms."

MATT was pleased, with no tinge of envy, at Gitty's embarrassed announcement of her engagement. It was much to him that his sister should go without sense of shame to another home to which she carried no disgrace, since it lay under the like ban.

"I'll give you the farm for a wedding present, Gitty," said he one day.

Matt might sigh and tell Demosthenes Mix that no man need covet his wealth. Yet it is easier to depreciate what we have than what we lack, and, with all the money failed to bring, there were alleviations in such possibilities as this offer presented.

His sister dropped her knitting-work, aghast. "What farm?"

"Why, this. The Hager farm."

"Oh, Matt! Father wouldn't like it." She stopped abruptly. The bright color faded from her cheeks. "I forgot," she stammered. "It's hard to realize."

"Yes," the young man continued steadily, "it's

hard to realize, and yet one must, that father has nothing more to say about us, nor about the place. I shall make it over to you, Gitty."

For Stephen Van Rensselaer, and other landlords following his precedent, had, soon after the tragedy of Hager's sale, given up the fight, in so far as offers highly advantageous to the tenants were thereupon made toward their purchase of the land they occupied. Renters and Anti-renters alike were appalled by the result of their long dispute. Open insurrection was at an end, although the underlying bitterness was there, as the recent election had shown. The generous proposals were generally accepted, and under them Mathice purchased both the Mayham place and the Hager farm.

"It's very good of you," said Gitty with the effort she always felt in giving open praise. "You've been free-handed with mother and me, Matt. We appreciate it."

"There's nothing very fine in turning over to you what I don't want myself. When are you going to be married?"

"That's it," said she. "I don't know when we can, I'm sure."

Matt broke into a boyish laugh. "Well, I declare," he remarked, "you don't act as if you cared much."

His sister smiled with a very sweet and womanly blush. "I don't," she confessed. "Honestly, Matt, I'm just as happy as I can be. Nothing worries me any more."

Matt drew a deep breath. "You'd better thank God," he said in a low voice.

"Why, I do, every night! But," in a brisker tone as she returned to a more common phase of thought, "there's no chance of our marrying yet a while. Of course mother could n't be left alone. You can't come to live with her, nor yet she won't go to live with you. Oh, I've thought it all out! And Almiran's mother is just exactly as dependent. He's all she has, you might say, with no brother and sister. And since she's got so helpless with her rheumatism" —

"It would be impossible for Almiran to leave home. I see that, and yet there ought to be some way for you to go there." Matt scowled reflectively. Gitty went on placidly with her knitting.

"It's real good of you to take such an interest," she observed.

"I want you should be happy," he answered.

The unconscious emphasis upon his second pronoun recalled to his sister's memory Matt's own love affairs as she had suspected them. Selfish by nature, her happiness brought with it sympathy, and she felt tender of this good brother. "Oh, by the way," she observed casually, "you remember what you asked me, a while ago, about Mossy Mix?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's not a word of truth in it."

"Why, he told me so himself."

"Oh, Mossy Mix! What does his talking amount to? She told me how it was, *herself*,

when you come to that. She says he's driving her out of her senses taking for granted what is n't so."

Matt laughed again, this time with so changed an expression that his sister exclaimed, "I declare you're getting real good-looking!"

"For mercy's sake," he answered shortly, "don't let's discuss my beauty. Did she tell you in so many words she was n't going to marry him?"

"Yes, she did. So there!"

Matt sat staring at the floor. "And she just can't endure Mr. Rockwell," Gitty added comfortingly.

The bright look faded from his face. "The trouble is," Matt observed dryly, as he rose, "that she can't endure me either."

"I don't see whatever made me say he was handsome," thought Gitty, watching him. Aloud she added, "Yes, she can too. You always got along together. What's the matter now?"

"I don't know," kicking one foot against the andiron. "Everything, I guess. She treats me as if I was a dog."

Gitty shook her head, completely mystified. "I can't understand it. What have you done?"

"I have n't done a thing. It is n't that. It's what I am." He was glowering into the fire. Suddenly he raised one fist and brought it down upon his thigh. "Look at me, a rank Downreuter, living at my ease on the Squire's money, and my old father in prison for life. No wonder she can't bear the sight of me."

Gitty uttered a little shriek. "Don't say such horrible things, Matt. It is n't — decent."

He raised his gloomy face, but quickly looked down again. "That's so. And yet the thing is true. Well, let's talk of something else."

"I can't — not yet. Matt, I had no idea you were feeling this thing in that kind of a way."

"Probably not. Thank the Lord for that, too. It is the way I look at it, and the way she does apparently; I am the one Downrenter who skulked out of his punishment when it fell on everybody else. And my father — No, I tell you I won't discuss it any longer. See here, Gitty! Why should n't Jemima Lane come and live with mother?"

"When?"

Gitty's slow brain was not accustomed to these rapid turns.

"When you're married. You'd more than take her place at the Sweets'."

"Why, that's a beautiful plan!" she cried. "You *are* bright, Matt. Whatever made you think of it?"

She was thoroughly diverted. Her brother smiled sadly. But he liked the praise. "I have to think nowadays," he answered. "The Squire's affairs call for all you'll give them. Well? Then you agree to it?"

"Indeed and indeed I do. If mother is willing, and — and the others."

"All right. I guess I'll be getting home."

Gitty betrayed immediately the impatience of a

woman. "Why not drive around by his house and talk it over with Jemima?"

"Now? To-night?"

"There's no time like the present. I'd like to see whether she thinks it can be done."

"All right," Matt replied carelessly. "I'll go."

"I guess she'd rather," said Gitty, rolling up her knitting, "as long as Henry Fisher's here."

"Yes, that was one thing I thought of."

If Matt hoped for another compliment on his powers of reflection he was disappointed. This came, however, from no lack of appreciation. "While you're about it," Gitty suggested, following him to the threshold, "I wish you'd tell Jemima what you did me, about Phe."

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed the young man.

"Matt Hager, listen to me. You just tell her. She knows Phe Colton through and through. Maybe she can explain Phe's acting so. It means something."

"I told you what it means."

"That's all stuff. You've got nervous living out there by yourself, or you'd never imagine such horrors. Mark my words, there's something behind it. You tell Jemima."

Matt tossed his head as if this advice were too foolish for so much as a refusal. Still, Gitty returned to her work well pleased with his prospects no less than her own. "He'll tell Jemima," she said to herself.

And after the short business conference, while Jemima mixed her bread and Matt stood by in the

buttery, he broached the matter precisely as his sister had foreseen. He obtained Jemima's goodwill for his scheme and her promise of coöperation. Then, drumming on the edge of the shelf beside him, he went on, —

"So Mrs. Colton's got a houseful this winter?"

"Yes."

"Every one of 'em after the daughter, I hear."

"Yes."

Matt drummed very fast. "Which one will get her?"

"Not any of 'em," replied Jemima promptly. "She sees too much of 'em."

She eyed the broad shoulders and the averted head reflectively. "I s'pose I got to help him out," she thought before she said aloud, "You go there often?"

Matt shook his head. "Once was enough."

"How's that? I don't understand ye."

"I guess you'd understand if you saw how she treated me." Matt spoke with scorn. "Not that I'm complaining, nor yet that I don't stand by my father. I'd do that in the face of a thousand girls, even a thousand girls like her. For all, I shan't put myself in the way of seeing how she looks down on me."

Jemima leaned her weight on the arms manipulating the dough. Her eyes read his features attentively, yet with a far-away gaze. "When was this? Lately?"

"No. A year ago. I went there to pay a bill."

"Since the Squire passed away?"

"Why, yes," astonished at the question. "The bill was for the doctor's attendance."

Jemima's cheeks showed a dull brick-red at her next query. She was divided between pity for Matt and a resentful pride for Henry Fisher. "Did she always behave like that,—as if she despised ye for your poor father's foolish actions?"

"No," Matt replied. "The very night before Dr. Colton died I was there. And she was just as good to me! It was only after I came into my money she showed out what she thought of an Anti-renter that went scot-free and had a father in prison."

Jemima resumed her kneading. "That's all I want to know."

"What is all you want to know?" demanded Matt peremptorily.

"Wait a minute. All in good time. You going to the donation party a-Wednesday?"

He made an impatient gesture of dissent.

"Why not? Ev'rybuddy's goin'."

"I'm not. And you understand my reasons well enough."

"I understand well enough what folks say,—you're purse-proud."

"I'm what?"

"Stuck up. You keep yourself to yourself since ye come into Squire Mayham's prop'ty."

Matt gasped his amazement. "Well, I never!" he ejaculated. "Is that the talk?"

Jemima nodded. "Don't ye s'pose, when ye

went to pay that bill, likely Phœbe thought so, too?"

"She could n't. How could she?"

"Well, I do' know. Did ye give the money to her?"

"Yes."

"Counted it out in her hand?"

"Yes," in a fainter tone, "I did."

Jemima hit the bread dough hard. "Well, of all poor fools," said she, "give me a man in love. And he wants to know what makes her act so stiff!"

"Oh, come, Jemima"—the young man began.

"You hearken to me. Go to that donation party a-Wednesday. Go right up to Phe. You be humble with her. You be meek. But you stick clos't to her. And don't ye take 'No' for an answer."

"Like Mossy Mix," Matt interrupted gleefully. His face was radiant.

"Yes. Ye might well take a leaf out o' Mossy's book. But yet," alarmed by the effect of her advice, "for the land's sake be careful. Don't ye be too sure. And don't let her suspect you're sure at all."

"Oh, Jemima," Matt cried, "how can I ever repay you?"

"Go along! Repay, indeed! I guess that's what women's put into this world for,—to git men into scrapes, or to git 'em out ag'in. Ye go along home now, and think over what I say."

Matt thought to such purpose that, on the night

in question, he appeared at his mother's house and declared his intention of accompanying Gitty and Almiran to the dominie's.

"I'm real glad," said his sister. Even Maria Hager looked pleased.

Matt ran back and forth between the great scooplike sleigh at the gate and the kitchen, whence he carried Gitty's contribution and the jar of butter his mother added. He seemed so young and so gay that the woman, stricken with sorrow, smiled at his bustling high spirits. "It's good to see him like that again," she concluded, "and it's natural. I guess he has forgotten."

Gitty came to her chair at the fireside to kiss her good-by. The caress was an innovation, nor could the girl imagine how the older woman writhed beneath it, discerning the commiseration under the tenderness. It was hard to endure her daughter's expression of happiness, however truly she rejoiced over the happiness itself. She drew a sigh of relief when the three young people with their silly clamor had finally left her alone.

"It's best I should be by myself," she said to the fire, "as long as I can't have father."

A log broke and sputtered. She readjusted its ends with the tongs. "The children are young. They forget. And that's right. But I'm old and I can't forget. It's best I should be alone.

"Father liked a beechwood fire," presently she continued aloud. "I wish — O my God, O my God," wringing her hands together, "not ever again in this world! And for all that, he's alive!"

There came a slight noise outside that made her start. "Yes, I'm better off by myself. What would the children think if they saw me?"

The noise grew more distinct. It was the crunch of a footfall upon the frozen snow. Maria's frightened eyes sought the window. There was neither shade nor curtain. The black panes reflected a starless night without.

"It sounded like" —

A shriek tore from her parted lips. Her white, strained features glared at the narrow window. Her body bent forward in an attitude of rapt wonder. For there, looking in at her and the firelight, the comfort and the warmth, stood a man, and one she knew. It was Jacob Hager.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE DONATION PARTY

Money never made any man rich. — SENECA.

BEFORE Maria Hager could shake off the paralysis of supreme terror the face at the window disappeared. The door opened gently. Her husband stood on the sill. He regarded her with a silly smile.

"Well," said he, "here I be."

At the sound of his voice she leaped forward. Seizing him by the coat she pulled him into the room. "Shut the door," she panted. "Hide! You must hide, father, right away."

He looked at her appealingly, like a child. "What I got 'o hide for?"

"Why, so they can't find you." She was gazing about her distractedly. "The cellarway would be a good place."

"So who can't find me, mother?"

"The officers; the folks that are hunting for you, to take you back."

"What they want 'o take me back for, mother? I been let out."

Her mouth fell agape. "Say that again. Let out from where?"

"From — that place. You know. The governor let us out."

"Jacob Hager," shrieked his wife, "is that true?"

"Honest it is. The new governor let us all out. They was eleven of us. Don't you believe me, mother?"

He put out one hand timidly and took a fold of her gown between his fingers. It was the nearest approach to a caress that she could remember in the years she had been his wife.

"I can't seem to sense it," she answered wildly. "Where are the rest?"

The question sounded brutally dubious, like the cross-examination of a witness.

"They're comin' along to-morrow, all together. They thought they'd make a time. I told 'em I was too old for sech doin's. I guessed I'd jes' slip into town by myself, an' nobuddy the wiser. I'd ruther."

Hysteric sobs shook Maria's frail body. Jacob watched her, trembling. "That's the way I feel, too," he whispered.

For it was a new man who had come back to her as if from the dead. If, indeed, one could be "born again when he is old," such a fate was Jacob Hager's. The iron will had been broken, the conceit crushed under the merciless hand of the law.

No rumor arrived at Farley that night concerning this action of Governor Young. No one had heard of the general pardon extended, as soon as

he took his oath of office, to those punished for Tobias Snyder's death. Mercy was shown on the plea that, the insurrection being subdued, there was no sufficient object to be attained by their further imprisonment. But, as Maria had told herself, memories are short and facts soon grow enduringly familiar. To her children and to the other guests at the donation party there came, with the evening, a common resolution to be merry and to forget.

The house buzzed from the noise of high-pitched conversation and the romping fun of children. Matt discovered his sister to be only too willing to leave him to his own devices, while she slipped beside Almiran into a seat on the staircase. He had his set purpose and went about it after a dogged fashion, "all Hager," Gitty thought, amusedly watching his movements.

He proceeded from room to room on a determined quest, even invading the kitchen where the older women were preparing supper. At sight of him Jemima Lane dropped the knife which divided an election cake into generous triangles. "Settin'-room," she formed her lips to hint.

He nodded and disappeared in the direction indicated. Jemima's eyes followed him with the tenderness a woman has for a man's simplicity.

"Poor dear cre'tur'!" she mused, resuming her work. "He's went an' put the ol' Squire's di-mon' pin in his neckcloth, an' he's got on his flowered wes'cut. Of all ways to make her forget his money, to dress himself up to kill! My, my, how foolish a body in love can act!"

She was to see this truth set forth again within the next half hour. Shrill cries from the hall broke in upon her reverie, and a fellow worker exclaimed impatiently, "Well, it does seem as if the young folks might keep out of here. They've got all the rest of the house to train in."

Jemima looked up. A troop of blushing girls and bashful youths swept into the room. They bore in their hands a long rope tied together at the ends.

"We're going to make a Copenhagen ring," some one announced.

Jemima cut another section of cake. "I think Henery Fisher might be in better business," was her mental criticism. She had spied Henry among the players.

The swaying circle moved here and there in the open space they found. In the struggles of feminine coquetry and masculine persistence they pushed back and back unconsciously until they pressed against the women at the table.

"Now you childern git out o' here," Jemima scolded. "You're in the way. Ye bother. An' we ain't no time for nonsense."

She extended one hand as she spoke, to emphasize her words by a push at the nearest intruder. Her fingers touched the jerking rope taut between a ring of holders. Instantly Henry Fisher, from the middle of the circle, had darted forward. He dealt a smart slap upon her knuckles.

Jemima stood rigid with astonishment. She actually supposed this was his response to her in-

terference. In another second, and before she had stirred or spoken, he flung both arms about her. He kissed her a resounding smack upon the cheek.

"Why, you impident scamp!" cried Jemima.

Rapturous shouts arose from all parts of the room, from workers and frolickers alike. "Now you're in the ring, Jemimy," Mary Ann Mix explained with a giggle.

"No, I ain't," said Jemima. Her face had grown very pale.

Henry stooped and slid under the rope, his gaze fixed apprehensively on her. As she moved away to the table he followed.

"You mad at me?" he whispered.

"Git along. Ye jog my elbow."

"Jemimy, ye ain't mad, be ye?"

"I tell ye ye're joggin' my elbow. I can't do a thing if ye git in the way like that."

"Then don't do nothin'." The soft voice took on a new tone, one to which no woman ever listened unmoved, for it spoke with authority. "Put down that knife. I want ye should listen to me, Jemimy."

"How can I listen," she snapped — but she laid the knife on its plate — "with all this noise goin' on?"

"You can hear well enough," said Henry calmly. It was the quiet of desperation, although that she did not suspect. "What I want to know is, be ye mad at me for what I done?"

The busy fingers played with her apron hem. Jemima Lane was coy.

"You tell me this minute," Henry continued. "I want to know. If ye be, I'm goin' out that door there an' right straight home. I won't even stay for supper."

Jemima gave her head a sly toss. "Ye neenter feel as bad as all that."

"Well, I do. I would n't hurt your feelin's, not for five dollars I would n't."

Jemima sobered a trifle. The conversation began to savor of their old relations, — respect on his side, condescension upon hers.

"That's all right," said she with a gesture as if to leave him. "I guess we won't say any more about it. You was thoughtless, and did n't consider what ye done."

"Yes, I did too," Henry argued bluntly. "I did consider what I done. That was why I done it."

"Why, whatever ails you, Henery Fisher, to talk like that?"

"I mean," Henry went on in a shaken murmur, "I acted with my eyes wide open, as ye might say. I always wanted to kiss ye, Jemimy Lane. There, now, ye know the worst."

To his dismay, although scarcely surprising to his sense of guilt, the face he was scanning quivered. The sharp eyes filled with tears.

"Jemimy," he faltered, "ain't it best to be honest? Ye see egzacly how I feel. Won't ye never forgive me the longest day ye live?"

"It ain't that."

"What is it, then? What makes ye feel so bad?"

"It's because — Oh, Henery Fisher, stop starin' at me so. It's because I like you too."

Henry's gloom disappeared on the instant, and he became strangely bold. Laying his hand on hers, "If that's true," said he earnestly, "I don't wonder ye should cry. Sech a woman as you be to take up with a poor stick like me! I'll do my very best, though, Jemimy."

"Well, first off," she commanded, "stop your talkin' so silly. I guess I know Henery Fisher by this time, and I know Jemimy Lane. All is, I'm satisfied."

"The Lord sees that I am," was his fervent response.

"For all that, you go right off. Folks'll notice."

"No, they won't. Not a soul's lookin'. They got too much else on hand."

"I tell you to go away."

"All right," said Henry serenely. Thereupon, from the heights of his happiness, he perpetrated the first and last joke of his life. "May I have the pleasure o' waitin' on ye home, Miss Lane?" he inquired with a bow of humorous depth.

Jemima was as far beside herself. She dropped him an angular curtsy. "Yes, and thank ye kindly, Mr. Fisher," she replied.

With this walk before them in anticipation they could afford after that to gaze from afar upon each other throughout the evening. Jemima slipped from the room presently to find Matt Hager.

"I've kind o' got them childern on my mind," she told herself.

She had heard that Phoebe was to play the accompaniments for Allie and several other singers in a little musical programme. She went to the door of the sitting-room and peeped in.

Matt Hager, elaborately patient, stood near her, leaning against the wall. Omar Mix was roaring "Oft in the Stilly Night," at the piano where Phe was seated. Matt shook his head at sight of Jemima. He wore the martyr air of one who has been duped. "I have n't had a chance to get a word in edgeways," he informed her.

"No, o' course not. Not yet. We 'll have supper in a minute. They must be 'most through."

"Caty Acker's going to sing next. She told me so."

"Hush. You better move up closer to the instrument."

"Why?" Matt looked at her stupidly.

Jemima felt as if she had the entire weight of this love-affair, no less than her own, upon her shoulders. "Because Mossy Mix is makin' that way," she explained in a vexed undertone.

It was too late. The important little man, who knew no hesitation, nor bashfulness, who understood what he desired and was unconscious of opposition, could march coolly between the rows of chairs, elbow men one side, beg easy pardon of groups of women whom he disturbed, and so, in the sight of all the world, take up his station close to Phe Colton's side.

Matt uttered an ugly exclamation, and another at the start, the involuntary glance of dismay,

with which the girl greeted Demosthenes' arrival.

"You go right up there, too," enjoined Jemima from the doorway.

"I will," Matt promised, "as soon as the music stops." To himself he added, "Well, there's this about it: say Jemima is mistaken; say she fairly hates me. Yet she would be relieved to have anybody save her from that man. I could see it in her face."

So in the bustle of a rising audience, the scraping of chairs and clapping of hands, he boldly pressed forward through the throng. Phe, springing up from the piano, desperate as he had imagined, saw Demosthenes approaching her from the one side and Matt Hager, under whose presence she had been nervous throughout the evening, coming as swiftly from the other.

"May I have the honor," began the lawyer with his ceremonious bow, "of escorting you to supper, Phoebe?"

This was to be expected. "To wait on a girl to supper," as "to wait on her home" were ordinarily extended marks of pointed attention. Phe looked about her absently. "I told Allie" —

She was fully aware of her rudeness. She remembered he was her mother's best-paying boarder. But she felt that she did not care.

Matt Hager advanced at this juncture. No one could tell from any outward show how his heart was thumping against his side. He reached out one hand and took Phe's, drawing it within his

arm. "I believe I am to have the pleasure," said he.

Demosthenes was disconcerted. By the time he recovered himself the pair were so far away that, after a step in their direction, he recognized the absurdity of questioning the incident and decided to bide his time. "The insolence of wealth," he remarked to Omar, who was standing by. "Poor Phœbe was walked off without any choice in the matter. I hope she will properly resent such impertinence."

Fortunately for Matt, as Phe, with a girl's aptitude for self-torture, was recalling her old grievance and beginning to wonder if his behavior were not patronizing, he spoke in the humble tone Jemima had recommended. "I hope you don't mind," he began. "I thought you might be glad of anybody, just as a means of escape."

"I was," said Phe.

"Even me," the deprecating voice continued.

Before the girl could reply to this unexpected speech with its mysterious implication, they were greeted by a group of girls seated about the doorway of the kitchen. "Let Phe come here with us, Matt Hager," called Josephine Mix. "I've got a chair for her. You push right in, Phe, and Matt, do get us something to eat. We're 'most starved."

Matt could not conceal his dismay at this enforced separation. Phe, however, was obediently ensconcing herself between Gitty and Mary Ann. He followed Almiran and Omar in a raid on the

tables. "All right," he answered as the inevitable formula of acquiescence.

"I declare," Josephine observed, tittering affectedly, "he's as willing to fetch and carry as if he wan't the richest man in the county. It's real noble of him, ain't it?"

"Why, as far as that goes," said Gitty apparently to no one in particular, "money has n't changed Matt, not a mite. He's just the same as he used to be."

CHAPTER XXX

THE MAN WITHOUT A COUNTRY

"At dawn the mountain ; after noon the fountain."

MATT still watched his opportunities. After supper, as the girls fluttered to their feet with much readjustment of flowing gowns and many sidelong glances toward their attendants, the young fellow placed himself in Phe's path and, unheeding some beseeching smiles from her companions, gazed resolutely past them on to the one for whom he waited.

"We're all going to play 'Green Grow the Rushes,'" said Polly Vroman archly as she passed him. "You coming, Matt? You'd better."

"I don't know. I'll see."

He caught Phe's eye at last. "Do you intend to play?"

Phe blushed sweetly. "Oh, no. I'd rather not."

"Come on, Phœbe," called the other girls. "You've got to. If one backs out all the rest will. Come on. It's only fun."

She saw that they considered her prudish and selfish in withholding them from what was a mere sport, unless any of their number stood aloof; then, as they said, all must do so perforce. Phe wondered, as often before, wherein lay the difference between herself and these light-hearted,

unthinking hoydens to whom a kissing game was only fun.

"Oh, very well," said she hurriedly, "I'll play for a little while. But I have a headache."

With this loophole for escape according to circumstances, she followed the other girls, and Matt followed her. They entered the sitting-room, where the furniture had been pushed flatly against the wall, and a dancing ring of mirthmakers occupied the centre of the floor.

"Green grow the rushes, O,
Green grow the rushes, O.
Kiss her quick and let her go.
Do not let her mother know."

An untuneful chorus chanted the lines. A youth from the centre of the circle made a dash toward a girl standing near the last arrivals.

"Oh, Mr. Rockwell's playing," said Mary Ann over her shoulder.

They edged their way into places, — all the laughing girls and the three or four young men, all but Phe and Mathice Hager. She was unnoticed in the press forward, and looked up at Matt, an expression in her eyes that made him long to thrust his broad shoulders between her and the others. "I can't do it," she murmured. "I — I think it's disgusting."

"So do I," said Matt at once. "Don't you do it, then. I'll stand by you."

However, Demosthenes had joined the ring as soon as he noticed its recruits. He embraced an opportunity, and no sooner had he been selected

for the post of honor than he made a playful run toward Phe Colton. Those around her fell away to the right and the left. She was motionless, taken by surprise. Demosthenes threw one arm around her.

The touch was an awakening. Matt, as well, started forward.

"I'm not playing," gasped the girl.

"Yes, you are. Yes, you are," screamed the others, clapping their hands.

"Yes, you are, Phœbe," echoed Demosthenes assuredly. He bent his head to hers. She gave Matt a glance that cast herself on his mercy.

"Stop," he said scarcely above a whisper, and yet Demosthenes drew back. "Miss Colton told you she was not playing."

"Oh, yes, she is," was the unabashed retort. Mossy threw a roguish smile at the onlookers. "I'll take my chances of that," he answered, and they applauded his spirit. It was the heedless gayety of young people, simply bred, knowing one another from infancy, retaining much of the innocence of childhood. To Phe Colton and Mathice Hager an embrace from Demosthenes implied far more than this.

"Stop," repeated Matt in the same quiet tone. "Don't you see — how she feels?"

No. Demosthenes could not see. He laughed, without other reply.

"Come, Mossy," urged his brother, "you're keeping the game. Hurry."

"Green grow the rushes, O."

Matt was in truth "all Hager." He laid a firm hand on Mossy's shoulder. "I forbid you to do it," he said.

Demosthenes gaped at him dully. "You forbid it? By what right?"

"By the best right. I do not wish it."

He turned to Phe. She alone had overheard him, and his face was no whiter than her own. "Come," he added aloud, "let us get out of this crowd somewhere by ourselves."

They passed from the room together, followed by countless sly comments. And Demosthenes played no more that night.

The stairs were deserted for the sports, growing more riotous, in the rooms below. Earlier in the evening they had been thronged by young couples, but now Matt took his choice of seats. It was he who led and she who followed silently while he selected a place isolated, although visible from the hallway, at the landing in the flight of steps.

"Will you sit here?" he asked, indicating the spot.

She obeyed again, still without a word. He stationed himself at her feet.

"Well?"

Phe's head was averted.

"Please look at me." As he gazed up earnestly he went on in a trembling whisper. "Are you very angry at what I told Mossy Mix?"

"I should be," she replied, viewing her interlaced fingers with interest, "if you had not done it to help me. But you have been high-handed to-night!"

"That's so," he acknowledged gloomily. "I don't see how it was. I meant to be so humble! Things seemed just to happen" —

"Oh, yes," somewhat stiffly. "You intended to be kind. I understand that. And so I shall not be angry."

He leaned his elbow on the stair above him and his head upon his hand. This brought his face close to hers. "Phe! Are you going to live up to it — what I told Mossy Mix?"

"How absurd!" She laughed lightly.

"What is absurd? That I should claim any right to you? Yes, I admit that." He straightened himself, drawing aloof. "It is absurd in me to look so high."

The bitter note in his voice went to her heart — not a very hard heart ever, nor ever hard toward Matt Hager. "I mean — You know what I mean."

"No," said Mathice in a tone of decision. "I have n't known for the past year what you meant; unless it was the one thing I feared."

"And what was that?" He fancied she stooped toward him — a little.

"I thought — I was driven to think — you saw my position as it was plain to me: I, an Indian and a Downrenter, whose father suffers in his stead."

She gave a breathless cry. He continued as if he had not heard, "I did n't blame you, Phe."

"How could you help blaming me if you fancied I was — like that?"

"It is the truth. I am an object for contempt."

Phe's eyes shone brilliant and beautiful as she smiled down on him. "You are an object for envy and malice and all uncharitableness — what I pray, every Sunday, the Lord to take from my soul. Oh, can't you see? You are Squire Mayham's heir!"

Matt's elbow went back to the upper step, and his head to his hand. "You foolish girl!" said he fondly. "So that was it? I could n't believe Jemima."

"Have you been talking me over with Jemima Lane?"

"Why, Phe, I had to talk to somebody. I was desperate."

Phe smiled. He guessed she was not very angry.

"I asked her right out what the trouble was. I mean if it was — as I thought."

"Don't say that again."

"And she gave me the first hint it might be something else. I never dreamed of the money coming between us — a little thing like that."

Phe resented the implied reproach. "It may be a little thing to own," she replied; "it is n't a little thing to want. But there — you can't understand, of course. We shan't say another word about it."

"What shall we say?"

Matt's smile would have been supremely silly to a third person. There was no third person, and to Phe it was charming. She returned the look. "Oh, what you please."

"You know what I please, — to say how much I love you."

The corners of her mouth twitched. "You certainly have n't said that. You've only talked about why you have n't."

"Oh, Phe!"

"And you have n't asked," studying her folded hands once more, "whether I cared a straw for you. You do take things for granted!"

"Dear me," sighed Matt, although not as if he were particularly distressed, "and I set out to be so meek!"

"Pooh, you can't be meek," Phe said.

It was obviously not in the least the programme Jemima painstakingly laid out. Yet it had served its purpose, and neither Matt nor Phe ever regretted his action. He was "all Hager," but it had been proved that the Hager disposition could be moulded by the brute force of circumstances. Mathice was of the stuff from which tyrants are made. The training of his boyhood, under another's tyranny, the fact that his chance came to him when and how he met it, the sunshine of his later days, the influence of his wife, — these formed in him that finest of characters, a fully controlled and fully developed will.

He had seen troublous times, and he was not to outlive their influence. Peace was apparently restored. There were no more disturbances between landlords and tenants, the latter of whom had received, or were to receive through future legislation, the most of their demands. And still the old

leaven was working underneath the amicable settlement.

Twenty years after the day of Hager's sale Demosthenes Mix was a candidate for Congressman. He had risen in that time to the front rank in State politics. He was recognized as an honest and clever exponent of party principles. The Mix family went wild with pride over his nomination. There was a large vote cast, the largest ever polled outside what is called "a presidential year." Jacob Hager, Nicelas Mann, and Storm Zielle had not been restored to citizenship. They were among the few men who failed to appear at the polls on that third of November.

But Demosthenes was defeated. More than that, it was his own county which brought about his rival's election. It was in Farley that there was the heaviest vote for his opponent.

"I am completely at a loss to understand it," he said in talking it over at the Mayham place, where he was dining; "I supposed I was personally popular. I represent the political preferences of a majority of our voters. It was not money that did it. Between you and me, Mathice, our side had twice the amount they put up. There was some mysterious influence at work. It baffles me."

Matt looked at his wife. He often did.

"Shall I tell him?" his eyes inquired.

She nodded.

"See here, Mossy," he began, leaning forward in his armchair. "I might as well be frank with

you. It's no kindness to let it go. This was n't from any fault of yours. It's the old Anti-rent trouble."

Demosthenes stared his incredulity. "What had I to do with that?"

"Nothing at all. But you happened to be a cousin of Lawyer Van Zandt."

"Good heavens, man," cried the other, "you don't mean they'd bring that up against me?"

"I mean they did."

"I can't believe it," drawing a deep breath.

"You should know Farley at least as well as I do. That's Farley."

Demosthenes rose to his feet, still shaking his head. "And yet I cannot credit it."

He was wagging his large head as he strode down the terrace steps. That vanity had received many a blow in its day, but it rose, always fresh, to meet each new surprise. "I can't credit it," he repeated.

Jacob Hager sat on a bench in the summer-house, sunning himself luxuriously. Crazy Dan, crouching near him on the threshold, was shaping an arrow destined for Matt's youngest boy.

"I the Lord have called thee, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house.' Shall I say it again, old Jacob?"

"Yes," assented the listener. "I like to hear it."

Then he glanced up and saw their guest preparing to depart. "Oh, Mossy," he called, and strug-

gled to his feet. "See here, I'd like to speak to you."

"Very well," was the good-natured reply. "What is it?"

"Would ye mind steppin' out o' earshot? I don't want Crazy Dan should hear."

"Well — here, then. What is it?"

Jacob put out two gnarled hands and caught the lapel of Demosthenes' coat. His tone fell to a wheezing murmur. "I thought I'd tell ye 'bout that 'lection. I did n't vote ag'in ye."

"Yes, yes, I know, Mr. Hager. That's all right."

There was a purple flush on the wrinkled cheeks. The voice sank still lower. "I can't vote."

"Yes, I understand, Mr. Hager. Don't say any more about it."

"'Twas too bad if your heart was set on goin' to Congress. I'm sorry. But ye know how folks are. They don't forgit. An' I wan't a mite to blame. I did n't vote ag'in ye."

"I see. I understand."

"I could n't," said Jacob. "I can't vote."

There was a little pause. "Father!" called a clear voice. "Father!"

A wintry smile crossed the old man's lips. He raised his head with a certain air of pride.

"That's Matt's wife, Phœbe."

"Yes."

"She's a good woman. I tell ye, she's good to me an' mother. An' she's all-fired han'some, too."

"Yes," said Demosthenes again.

"Matt's done well. He's done well all around : his wife, an' his prop'ty, an' his childern — everything's seemed to prosper. But then — yes, Phœbe, I'm comin' in a minute — but then, ye see, he deserves it."

"Oh, yes," said Demosthenes.

"He's been a good man in his fam'ly, an' he's been a good boy to us. They ain't nothin' he won't do for us. They ain't nothin' he hain't done. They're good childern, him an' Gitty, an' they deserve their luck."

"Well, I think, Mr. Hager," Demosthenes observed cheerily, "that you're pretty well off yourself. You're looked after and tended and cared for, and proud of your son and daughter. You have a great deal to be thankful for, I'm sure."

"So I hev," old Jacob responded ; "so I hev. An' I guess you don't know how much. I ought 'o be thankful an' glad I'm free an' independent, an' got my home an' frien's. 'T ain't anything to fret me, is it, jus' because they won't let me vote?"

"No, no," Demosthenes assured him. "That's nothing, nothing at all."

"No, o' course not," with a wistful glance into the other's face. "O' course it ain't. I don't care. An' the childern are reel good."

"Father!" called Phœbe. "Father!"



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